

WOLF

Wesley Strick draft

Based on a screenplay by Jim Harrison

Mike Nichols, Director
Doug Wick, Producer

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Third Draft

FADE IN ON:

EXT. VERMONT HIGHWAY - DUSK

A bucolic vista somewhere in Vermont, rolling hills, budding leaves, winding two-lane road ... The moon is just rising, impossibly big and full, a ball of liquid light. We pick up a rental CAR -- touring the countryside? -- and CUT INSIDE:

INT. CAR - DUSK

A middle-aged couple, WILL and CHARLOTTE RANDALL, he perhaps ten years older, a faint defeated look, vague at the wheel. She a handsome woman with a streamlined body and haircut, as though to help her get one extra thing done each day.

WILL

You're mad.

CHARLOTTE

You're wrong. I'm not.

WILL

You are.

CHARLOTTE

You know what, I'm tired, is all. Of your depression. Everything depresses you.

WILL

Everything is depressing.

CHARLOTTE

You're not funny.

WILL

That's what I said.

CHARLOTTE

You think of my job as a kind of hobby, don't you? The Times Magazine would have a laugh, to hear that.

WILL

Good, it'd be good for the Times, the healing power of laughter ...

He glances at her, but she's not smiling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

I don't think of it as your hobby.
It's your job, okay?

CHARLOTTE

Oh well thank you.

(then)

I have to do this interview, Will.
The man won a Nobel in nuclear
medicine ...

She trails off. More silence.

WILL

I wish you were staying, just being
honest. Hoped we could take off,
maybe could've driven somewhere, some
inn or something, after ...

CHARLOTTE

You don't even know if you have a job
when you get back. Should be thinking
about getting back yourself.

WILL

Why do you think I'm staying at the
goddam conference? If I come back
with Claudia's new book I have a
better chance of keeping my job.

CHARLOTTE

You and your lady novelists ...

WILL

Not very politically correct, to call
them that. How about "Gyno-Americans"?

CHARLOTTE

(laughs, then)

Seymour actually refers to short
people as the vertically challenged.

WILL

He's making a joke.

CHARLOTTE

No, he really means it. Seymour --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL
Seymour. Mmm. The healing power of
stupidity.

He exits the highway -- there's a sign, outside her window,
for the airport.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - EVENING

Will and Charlotte at her gate.

CHARLOTTE
See you in the city.

WILL
Fly safely.

He kisses her cheek, she kisses his. Then joins the line of
passengers, boarding.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - WILL

walks back to the parking lot. And pauses, at the airport
bar, called (what else?) The Fogged Inn.

INT. "FOGGED INN" - WILL

takes a stool, at the otherwise empty bar.

WILL
Double scotch, please, no ice.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT (LATER)

Will's car again, alone on the road, its slightly erratic
progress lit by the magnificent moon. Now Will reaches a
fork. Slows, decides and, weaving somewhat, bears right ...

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Will blinks and squints, trying to hold the road in focus --
the feeling is, he's had more than one double. He looks for
landmarks but nothing seems familiar: he's surely made the
wrong turn. Will mutters a curse, stops, does an awkward "k-
turn" and starts to head back while feeling for the map, in
the pocket of his door ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

... then boom. He's hit something! Startled, Will slams on the brakes. Pauses, almost afraid to get out of the car and see what he's struck. Praying that it wasn't something living ...

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Will crouches in front of the headlights, sickened to find a large, furry animal lying here, torn open, on its side, gaping belly slick with blood ... Is it a dog? Is it alive? Will gingerly touches it and it moves -- writhing, really ...

Will gasps, as the animal raises up a bit and lifts its face to him, and he sees what it is: a wolf. Noble and dying, the distinctive yellow eyes quickly dimming. Bereft, Will reaches out to gently pat its head ...

... and the wolf opens its mouth, showing teeth, and nips Will's finger, weakly, but drawing blood regardless. Then the wolf falls back and dies, its own blood issuing dark and thickly from its throat.

Will stands, appalled, studying the dead beast and then his own punctured fingertip. The wound is not deep, doesn't hurt, but Will feels woozy and weak-kneed, nonetheless. He shakes off his queasy feeling, then takes a breath, leans down and grabs hold of the wolf's carcass, by its hind legs.

Will drags it off the road, with some difficulty: It weighs perhaps eighty pounds. And its guts are spilling out, too, making this a doubly dicey operation. But Will, stifling his nausea, manages to get the dead beast onto some grass, at the edge of the wood that comes up nearly to the road.

Now he starts to dig -- first with his heel, then with his bare hands -- a shallow grave, for the wolf. Again, it's hard work but Will does it without much thought, or heed to the heavy chill in the air ... Until he feels something, a presence, and quickly straightens up. Peers into the wood. And sees:

Several pairs of yellow eyes, not ten yards away, glimmering in the moonlight, studying him. Impassive, not accusing, but Will gets a clammy feeling and suddenly bolts back to the rental car.

Climbs in, starts it up, and races off into the night. As his tailights fade, we HEAR a baleful HOWL, from deep in the woods.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN ON:

EXT. UNION SQUARE NORTH - NOON (NEXT DAY)

The clamor of JACKHAMMERS signals our return to New York City, under perpetual, pointless construction.

Will drifts into the "MacLeish House" building, getting a facelift, half-hidden under scaffolding. Three LABORERS shout at each other, each in his own language: Portuguese, Rumanian, Swahili. Nobody understands anybody else ...

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S OUTER OFFICE - MORNING

Stacks of cartons, manuscripts messily piled. The place is in some kind of flux. Will wanders through the chaos past MARY, his assistant. Mary is spindly, severe, raven tresses, the hint of a kinky secret life.

WILL

Morning, Mary.

He's at the coffee maker, filling up. We sense that caffeine is currently his main energy source.

MARY

Morning, Mr. Randall. Thought you were back tomorrow.

WILL

Had to come in for something.

He doesn't say what. Noting that he looks tired, pale and distracted, Mary doesn't press.

MARY

Maude is --

WILL

-- in my office?

Mary nods, shrugs: hope that's okay.

INT. WILL'S INNER OFFICE - MORNING

Stubbornly functional. Peeling paint, funky furnishings. Windows that look south, across Fifteenth Street. Leaning against the wall, a corkboard with just one prospective book

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CONTINUED:

jacket, lopsided, for a novel titled Mozart In Paris, by Maude Waggins. Two years' worth of unread Publishers Weekly and Kirkus stacked atop rows of standard-issue gun-metal filing cabinets.

Will sits at a battered desk, his lunch-pail set next to a framed photograph of a GIRL, about twelve, wistfully smiling.

The very MAUDE WAGGINS, a striking and intense woman pushing seventy, sits opposite.

MAUDE

Candidly: How different is it going to be around here?

Will sighs; he barely has the strength for this.

WILL

I really don't know ... I'm not even sure I'm going to be here.

MAUDE

You're not serious. Charles Foster Kane hasn't extended an invitation ..?

WILL

Raymond Alden. And no, not so's you'd notice ... Though I don't think many have heard yet, who shall live and who shall die ...

MAUDE

After all you've accomplished, it's ghastly and unjust, to be left on tenterhooks, but you know that.

WILL

Although, with some rare exceptions -- like your stuff -- my recent books have bellyflopped. And I guess I lack the ... I don't know, brute force to make people forget, or disregard, that.

Maude waves away this self-effacement.

MAUDE

If you go, I go. No one else has touched my work since LBJ left office, and that's going back a ways ... So

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUDE (cont'd)
what are my obligations here, Will, do
you know?

WILL

I don't. But Stewart may. Stewart Swinton, I don't think you've met him, I brought him here from Ballantine, he was in Marketing, a beast but we've tamed him, if I do leave he'll probably come with me.

Maude rises, claps her hands.

MAUDE

Let's meet the boy wonder.

CUT TO:

INT. STEWART'S OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON

Somewhat brighter (windows face Union Square Park) and spiffier -- "power office" decor, accented with mementos, trophies, group photos from prep school and Ivy League days.

STEWART is late 30's, handsome, bulked-up and earnest, but with a hint of dissolution around the edges. He huddles with several production people.

STEWART

This is an event book, it's got to have heft. The fact that my writer crapped out at fifty-thousand words should be regarded as an opportunity, not as destiny. Ragged paper, major margins, font size for the legally blind ...

Spotting Will and Maude, he quickly dismisses the team with a thumb's-up and steps forward, smiling, hand extended.

STEWART

Maude Waggins ..?

MAUDE

(wary)

Do I know you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART

Not yet, but you saved my life, twice.
First, upon reading What About Us
Girls?, my freshman year at Yale --

MAUDE

(bored)

-- you realized you "had to write."

STEWART

Realized I had to stop writing. The second time was after college, I was going to follow a girl out to the Coast. When I caught you on WBAI, reading your ode to L.A. How did you describe the city? "Sprawled, insensate, stoned/a hustler flat on his back, getting blown."

MAUDE

(smiles)

Yes.

STEWART

According to Indian lore, someone who saves your life twice you must publish.

MAUDE

(laughs)

Kicking off with a double-truck ad in the New York Review of Books.

STEWART

Ah, you know Indian lore.

MAUDE

(turns to Will)

We never ran a double-truck ad even for my novels, did we?

WILL

Didn't have the wampum, Maude.

(then)

Stewart, would you know off the top, what Maude's contract here calls for? I mean, her unfulfilled commitments, whether there's a "key man" clause --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART

No clause. After Mozart In Paris, she's obligated to one more book, then we get a first look at her next two.

MAUDE

"One more book"? But nothing specified as to type, length, anything?

STEWART

It's your baby, Maude, we just stand back and watch it sell.

MAUDE

Then there's nothing to stop me from turning in an 80-page reminiscence of all the restaurants I've loved ...

STEWART

And nothing to stop us from asking twenty-one ninety-five for it.

Will smiles to himself, amused by Stewart's shamelessness and how utterly it succeeds.

MAUDE

I'll deliver it Friday morning.

STEWART

We'll sell out the first printing, Monday afternoon.

Maude giggles, girlish. But Stewart is suddenly serious. He lightly touches the back of her neck.

STEWART

Maude, would you mind waiting here just a moment? Get comfy, I want to talk with you ... Will and I just need one minute alone.

Will looks puzzled, though perhaps not surprised.

INT. STEWART'S RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

Stewart guides Will into a private corner. The following is very quiet, very discreet. Stewart looks almost stricken.

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CONTINUED:

STEWART

For what it's worth, and it's probably worth squat ... I heard from one of Alden's toadies this morning. They want me to stay on, they're making "editor-in-chief" noises. I told them Will Randall is editor-in-chief ...

Will is stunned, silent.

STEWART

You haven't heard anything?

WILL

Not so's you'd notice.

STEWART

Well, shit. Anyway, they know where I stand.

(then)

Are you okay?

Will is absently playing with the band-aid, that's wrapped around his fingertip.

WILL

Fine, why?

STEWART

You'll be there tonight, right? It couldn't hurt your case, to show ...

Will yawns, nods heavily. As though the thought of tonight makes him want to lie down, for a very long time.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON (LATER)

Will at his desk, wearing bifocals, in the midst of an exhausting line-edit of Maude's novel.

A KNOCK. A frail, rather pretty young man -- ROY PRAWL -- comes in. Stops. Folds his arms in a scolding fashion.

ROY

Give me that. It's going to eat you alive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

No, I find it ... rejuvenating, really
... Even with all the literary tricks,
it's moving too ... I cry every time
Wolfgang's mother dies.

ROY

So do I. Surrender, Dorothy.

WILL

Take it, I have to go see my doctor, --
get a shot.

He hands Roy the manuscript.

ROY

What --! Did Stewart bite you?

WILL

(laughs)

No, but you're warm.

As he starts out, Roy remembers:

ROY

Hey! Tonight! Alden's blood-feast!
Espresso followed by mass executions
... Promise you'll tell me how
everyone looked, before they were fed
to the lions. Except Mrs. MacLeish,
spare me that, the literary Dorothy
Lamour ...

WILL

I may not go, Roy. I mean, getting
fired has its perks, right? No
mandatory parties, first. That's the
big secret of losing, y'know: Played
right, it's the ultimate victory.

ROY

You have not been fired, and I can't
imagine you will be. But thanks for
the wise words, Zen Boss, I'll
remember 'em when I land back at
Bellevue on a Dilaudid drip.

Will has a mordant chuckle, then hurries out.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

We start CLOSE on a syringe in Will's shoulder, as we HEAR:

DOCTOR'S VOICE
A wolf? In Vermont? I don't think
so, Will ...

WILL'S VOICE
But you weren't there, Doc.

WIDER on Will's DOCTOR, a Ralph Bellamy-type who keeps a very traditional, even outdated office. As he examines, then cleans out, then redresses Will's bite:

DOCTOR'S VOICE
Sure it wasn't a Husky or something?
This was night, right? Dark out?

WILL
Full moon. And to answer your next question I was slightly drunk, not blind drunk. It was a wolf, I stared right at him. You can't mistake a dog for a wolf. That's like confusing Madonna with Marlene Dietrich ...

The Doctor sticks a thermometer into Will's mouth, stifling the next simile.

DOCTOR
Well it's funny. This isn't the only rabies shot I've given, last few months. My wife's sister-in-law, up in Oneonta ... A raccoon actually chased her onto her porch, bit her ass ... And out on Long Island, last summer, friend of a friend's son ... sustained brain damage, from a snake bite. Was just sitting by the pool, and next thing ... brain damage.

He takes out the thermometer, reads it: normal.

WILL
Right, it's a made-for-cable movie, starring Vincent Price and Vampira. The animals are pissed at us for the ozone and the twenty-four wars we've

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL (cont'd)
got going around the globe ... C'mon,
Doc, you just made up that stuff to
make me feel lucky.

DOCTOR

You are lucky ... Till recently we had
to give these shots directly into the
stomach muscle. Right about now I'd
be detaching you from the ceiling with
a putty knife. Get your shirt back
on, and make an appointment with Donna
for your next shot, in three days.

Will gets off the exam table. As he reaches for his shirt,
the Doctor assesses his less-than-sculpted physique.

DOCTOR

Will, you exercising at all?

Will grins, taps his temple with an index finger.

WILL

My noodle, Doc, my noodle. All day
and night.

He buttons up his shirt.

DOCTOR

How's Charlotte?

WILL

Better than both of us. Guess
nothing's gonna lick you when you've
licked the Big C.

DOCTOR

A tough cookie alright. Came through
it all, clean as a whistle.

WILL

And carved out a little career. "I
Was Charlotte's Ovary" and onward ...

DOCTOR

Well, send her my love.

Will agrees, with a wistful smile:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL
If I see her.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALDEN ESTATE - THAT EVENING

A spread maybe 45 minutes north of New York City, off the Hudson. The grandly-scaled Main House surrounded by guest cottages, staff quarters and a stable, and bounded by many acres of thick woods. OVER this ESTABLISHING SHOT, we HEAR a MAN'S older, vigorous VOICE. It is:

RAYMOND ALDEN'S VOICE

... And I want to welcome you all, to
... Well, think of us not as another
multinational media conglomerate, but
as an ark, of sorts, seaworthy in the
roughest storms ...

INT. DINING HALL - EVENING

Alden stands, at Table 1. A gentleman billionaire in his late sixties who'd suck your life force with no qualms if he needed five more minutes.

ALDEN

I hope you all know that if it were Marvin Davis or Sy Newhouse or Rupert Murdoch standing here, you wouldn't be eating dinner, you'd be kneeling, forehead to the floor, in the Muslim prayer position ...

He waits out the nervous laughter.

ALDEN

Well I'm pleased to say that few if any heads will roll at MacLeish House. And if they do, I promise it will be so quick, you'll feel only a tickle -- then, eternal peace.

More nervous laughter. When it subsides:

ALDEN

But let's not think about the bottom line tonight. Not austerity, not overhead, not even profits. Turn our

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALDEN (cont'd)
backs on profit and profit, I've
always found, will follow.

He sits, to polite applause.

AT OUR TABLE

There's Will and Stewart ...

WILL

How many mixed metaphors? I ran out--
of fingers, then toes.

And Charlotte, sitting beside a WOMAN we don't know, who stops gobbling her dessert long enough to announce:

WOMAN 1

I adore Raymond.

Will drains his wine. He's had a few.

WILL

We all do. There's at least three-billion reasons to.

Stewart smirks, nods.

STEWART

It's over. A matter of days, weeks, months at most.

WILL

You could make a case that the world's already ended. Certainly that art is dead, that the death of the six million Jews marked the end of art. That no metaphor, nothing of the imagination could ever again compete with that. So now instead of art we have daytime TV. Moral questions are discussed among ever more outre groups. Gay senior citizens, women who've been raped by the mailman confiding in Oprah ... There is no music, there's no painting, there's very little writing ... The only living field is physics, in which we're discovering that we may have created the universe. Which may be our biggest mistake ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

We must have lunch. What's your daytime phone?

Charlotte bursts out laughing.

STEWART

Edgar Doctorow says the world is ending in every way it possibly can end. It's ending in all directions --

WOMAN

It's certainly not ending as far as desserts are concerned. This is absolutely fabulous mousse.

Will considers a rejoinder. But a look from Charlotte tells him to restrain himself. Now an Alden ASSISTANT pauses at their table.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Alden wants to invite you out to the barn, when you're ready ...

Nearby we HEAR related comments, e.g., "He's got the Kentucky Derby winner in his stable, or something."

At neighboring tables, guests begin to rise, drift out.

WILL

To the stable, to the manger!
(refilling his wine glass)
"And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Tarrytown to be born?"

Stewart nods and smiles, pretending to get the reference, and the joke. Charlotte snorts.

CHARLOTTE

I wish I had a cream pie right now.

WILL

You're right, it would be good. You mean like this?

He swipes a hand in what's left of the Woman's mousse, and splatters some on his face.

CONTINUED:

He swipes a hand in what's left of the Woman's mousse, and splatters some on his face.

CHARLOTTE

(laughs)

Exactly.

Off the Woman's horrified look, we

CUT TO:

EXT. WALKWAY - NIGHT

Will, Charlotte and Stewart trail a small crowd, trooping along an artfully lit path to the barn. Quietly:

CHARLOTTE

You've got to introduce yourself to Alden tonight. Charm him into submission.

WILL

I get tongue-tied around moguls, say the wrong thing. "Marx was right" ...

CHARLOTTE

Lower yourself to save your skin, Will.

WILL

Much as I love you, Charlotte, it's sometimes a big pain in the ass, to be married to a Survivor.

CHARLOTTE

(smiles)

Fuck you too.

As they near the barn, Will slows.

WILL

I feel kind of weird. Actually. I'm gonna stay out here a minute, get some air.

STEWART

He's going back for more wine.

CHARLOTTE

Let him. You'll be my date.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Stewart throws a quick, embarrassed glance at Will as she takes his arm.

STEWART

Can't say no to the boss's wife.

He escorts Charlotte inside.

Will lingers out here, alone now, bathed in moonlight and lamplight. He takes a few deep breaths, trying to stave off the strange sensation, then picks at his band-aid until it peels away. Takes a look at the bite.

CLOSE - WILL'S FINGERTIP

The wound is open, raw, angry, even oozing a little bit.

BACK TO WILL

Nonplused. He messily replaces the band-aid, jams his hands in his pockets, and follows his wife and protege into:

INT. BARN - NIGHT

The building is part high-tech horse clinic, part stable. The tour has begun in the clinic, where Alden has just finished demonstrating various odd apparatus for impregnation.

ALDEN

... So we have the means to help create life here and, also, the means to end it if, God forbid, something should be broken, we have to put down the horse ...

Gesturing toward a shelf with ampules of drugs, and syringes.

Will watches, standing by the door, as the host leads his guests into the stable.

INT. STABLE - NIGHT

Eight horses are kept here. Now a splendid thoroughbred stallion is led out of his stall by a groom.

ALDEN

This is Fort Knox.

As the admiring crowd surrounds the stallion, a FIT-FOR-LIFER disgustedly remarks to a friend:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIT-FOR-LIFER

That is male beauty. I'm selling my Soloflex.

A Groom stands stiffly by, as Alden proprietorially strokes the plush mane.

ALDEN

He looks quite like Nearco, no?

Everyone AD LIBS agreement -- including those who think "Nearco" is a shipping magnate.

ALDEN

After Secretariat and Northern Dancer, he's the fastest Derby winner of all time. A mile in two minutes, one-tenth of a second.

But now everyone's attention shifts to the seven other horses, who have begun to snort and shy, in their stalls.

Will is standing here, looking somewhat discomfited: It is clearly he who, for some unknown reason, has caused the commotion. To the gaping group:

WILL

Excuse me, excuse me, they smell a socialist. I'll leave.

He backs out of the stable. As he passes Fort Knox, the thoroughbred snorts and rears.

Charlotte and Stewart trade looks.

EXT. STABLEYARD - NIGHT

Will is alone out here again -- but a bit agitated, now, by the peculiar event in the barn. Again, he tries deep breathing to calm his nerves. When this doesn't work, Will begins to determinedly trudge in a circle. Then stops, when he HEARS:

WOMAN'S VOICE

Isn't that how those tigers turned to butter, in "Little Black Sambo"?

Will looks at her. She's about thirty, wearing a perfect silk dress and a kind, inquisitive look one rarely finds on a woman so lovely.

CONTINUED:

Will quickly pulls himself together.

WILL

They call it "Little Brave Sambo" now. And oddly enough ... My doctor implied, just this afternoon, that I'm turning to butter. Coincidence, or conspiracy?

The young woman laughs. Puts out a hand.

WOMAN

My name's Laura.

WILL

(shaking)

My name's Will. Only I feel more like Won't, right now. I can't remember, maybe I forgot to floss ...

WOMAN (LAURA)

Oh, the horses, who cares ..? Do animals generally dislike you?

WILL

They generally don't know me. I rarely leave Manhattan Island. But I've certainly never scared any before.

LAURA

It looks as though they scared you too, if you don't mind my saying.

WILL

Well I do feel sort of peculiar.

LAURA

I understand. My father's put all of you in a terrible position. Inviting you here to laugh at his jokes, admire his beasts, while he decides whether to exterminate you.

Will blinks at her. He's belatedly realized:

WILL

You're Alden's daughter. I've read about you in Vogue or Vanity Fair or Spy or somewhere ... You're married to Shiek What's-His-Name ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

No, that was my "storybook princess" sister. They've separated.

WILL

Oh. I'm sorry.

LAURA

Don't be, she's quite happy. Living on a lesbian commune in Vermont.

Chagrined, Will shrugs: I know, I'm hopeless.

WILL

Sorry. Sorry, sorry ...

LAURA

No, we owe you the apology ... I love my father, but ... Wasn't it Stalin who'd invite his friends for dinner, then have them taken out and shot?

WILL

I really don't care what he decides. I think maybe I'm just not ambitious, or something. Or maybe that's what my wife thinks.

Laura silently registers this. Then:

LAURA

Why are the interesting ones always married?

Will flushes. Two beats, and then:

WILL

Why do you have to be married fifteen years before you meet the most beautiful girl in the world ..?

An even longer pause. Finally:

LAURA

So what about those Mets?

Will's -- and Laura's -- relieved laughter is drowned out by the generalized BUZZ of the Alden group, emerging from the barn. Suddenly self-conscious, each takes a step away from the other and turns to observe the host and his GUESTS, passing ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUEST 1

I thought, Not another Holocaust book.
 But it's selling, it's selling ...

And then we see a DOWAGER in a sort of sarong, who's hooked her arm in Alden's.

DOWAGER

The stable, the whole estate, what style ... It ought to be a book, on every coffee table.

Murmurs of agreement from all within earshot. Alden demurs:

ALDEN

Ah, Mrs. MacLeish ... Buggery, maybe. Matricide, maybe. A vanity book? Never!

Gales of laughter, from the group.

CUT TO:

EXT. RTE. 9 - NIGHT

We PICK OUT the Randalls' aging Volvo and HEAR, OVER:

CHARLOTTE'S VOICE

You were nice tonight.

INT. VOLVO (MOVING) - NIGHT

Charlotte is driving home. Will has tilted back the passenger seat; he's slumped, his head lazily lolls. His speech sounds fuzzy, as from too much scotch.

WILL

... Was I? How ..?

CHARLOTTE

I love you at parties. Even when you drink too much. You were so bitter and sort of wordly ... Maybe a bit word-y, but smart. And sweet ...

She waits for his response. And finally HEARS a deep, derisive-sounding SNORE. She glances over: Will's out cold. Charlotte turns back to the road ahead and, quietly, tears in her eyes:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
Goddamn you, Will.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANDALLS' BUILDING - NIGHT (LATER)

Charlotte has double-parked. The Doorman helps her walk Will (shambling, mumbling, a decorous bum) to the elevator.

DOORMAN
... bit too much celebration?

CHARLOTTE
Could be worse, he could be singing.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Charlotte undresses Will, disturbingly sprawled on the bed.

CUT TO:

CLOSE - ALARM CLOCK

As it WALES. The time is 7:15.

INT. BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Will makes no move to silence the alarm. With a groan, Charlotte reaches across him to shut it off.

CHARLOTTE
C'mon, Will ... rejoin the world ...

WILL
(grunts)
Gimme till eight, I'll be human again.

Charlotte resets the alarm for 8:00, then bolts out of bed.

SHOCK CUT TO:

EXT. TUNDRA - DAY (DREAM)

Blindingly white, this dazzling emptiness ... a raw brutal panorama of ice and snow, the wind whining ... and now, OVER:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE'S VOICE

Will ..!

INT. BEDROOM - WILL

bolts upright. His wife is standing over him. The whining was the alarm. Will turns to the clock: it's now 7:20.

WILL

Just gimme till eight ...

Then he looks out the window: it's night! As Charlotte turns off the alarm:

CHARLOTTE

When I found you here, I first thought you'd come home early, to nap, but there's five "Where are you?" messages from your office ... Are you alright?

Will pauses, takes stock, then concludes with some surprise:

WILL

I feel good.

CUT TO:

INT. SHOWER - WILL

vigorously soaps up, then stops to inspect:

CLOSE - FINGERTIP

This is very odd: The wound seems to be healing nicely. But around it, a tuft of hair is growing.

INT. BATHROOM - 5 MINUTES LATER

Will stands at the sink, daubing shaving cream on the fingertip. Now he takes his razor, and very carefully shaves off the strange hair growth ...

CUT TO:

INT. THE RANDALLS' KITCHEN - NIGHT (LATER)

Charlotte watches, disarmed, as Will (finger lightly bandaged) anticly chops vegetables, cubes meat, tosses it all in a cauldron, a culinary dervish ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE

Will ..? What's ..? Why're you so ...

WILL

(grins)

Couple reasons! First, it's all gonna work out, Charlotte ... If the Sword of Damocles should fall, I can take time off, I can write, I can teach, maybe we can travel. But most of all, because it's Mexican Independence Day! --

CHARLOTTE

No it's not --

But Will, who won't be dissuaded, launches into a bravura sound pastiche: fireworks, crowds, mariachi ...

Charlotte laughs, puzzled but not displeased.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Charlotte is nursing her bowl of beef stew. Will has already finished -- he's put away the beef, ignored the vegetables, left his red wine untouched (he guzzles tapwater) ... His gaze flicks from Charlotte's mouth to the cubes of meat she's idly stirring ...

CHARLOTTE

... want to move on from five-thousand words about radical mastectomies and new trends in estrogen therapy. "But you do it so well," they say, and all I can say is, "If I was a black food writer, and you'd only assign me, I don't know, some essay on chitlins ..."

She trails off and looks up, sensing that Will's not listening. Suddenly he's halfway across the table. Pausing to pop some beef from Charlotte's bowl, then he's all over her, cackling -- in a kidding way, but cackling nonetheless.

CHARLOTTE

Jesus, Will, what're you --

WILL

Haven't eaten, haven't drunk, haven't screwed, in over twenty-four --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)
Swallow first, and then maybe --

They fall to the floor, Will cushioning Charlotte's impact with a hand jammed hard under her ass.

CHARLOTTE

-- Hey --

-- -- CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

One of Will's favorites -- the Jazz at Massey Hall album -- plays as man and wife romp on the bed, Charlotte bemusedly letting Will take the lead. Will displays the self-mocking verve of a husband who hasn't lusted after his wife in too long, covering with a cartoonish exaggeration of lust.

He tugs off her blouse with his teeth. Then her slacks, which he slides down her thighs. She laughs:

CHARLOTTE

My, what great teeth you have ...

WILL

... The better to eat you up.

Now he starts softly biting her earlobes, nuzzling her hair ... then stops. Sits up, blinking. Charlotte sits up too.

CHARLOTTE

-- What?

Will shakes his head -- not sure. He looks vaguely troubled at his own abrupt mood-shift. Backs off the bed, crosses to the stereo, shuts OFF the music. We NOTE Will's large collection of classic jazz: Bird, Mingus, Monk, Coltrane ...

WILL

I don't know, I feel ... it's ...

He sniffs.

WILL

I smell something ... What ..?

Charlotte feels rebuffed, embarrassed, defensive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE

Chanel. Avida shampoo. Tide ..?

(then)

What the hell is with you, Will?

WILL

Nothing, I'm great.

He comes back to bed, chagrined at the coitus interruptus, not sure how to explain his instant loss of sexual appetite.

CHARLOTTE

I'm tired anyway. Got the workshop thing at Yale, tomorrow night.

She SNAPS off her night-light.

TIME CUT:

Hours later. Charlotte is asleep. Will is awake, listening to the city's night-sounds, exquisitely alert, cocking his head and darting his eyes at every car alarm, siren, shout ... every shriek of laughter and desire in the distance ...

CUT TO:

EXT. SEVENTH AVE. - MORNING

A bright spring day. Will reaches a subway station: People are elbowing each other to get down to the train. Will slows, considering joining the fray. Then decides: he can't face that. He keeps walking, at a healthy clip.

Pigeons peck around the remains of someone's take-out breakfast, left littered on the sidewalk. Will playfully wades into their space as a boy would, waving his arms and delighting in the cacophony as they squawk aloft. Then pauses, bewildered, as he sees:

IN HIS HAND

He's caught a pigeon, without trying. Will stares at the frightened bird, which stares back.

BACK TO SCENE

Will glances around, self-conscious. People are staring, though they haven't slowed down. Will lets go of the bird, which gratefully sails away. He starts walking again ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

... now blissfully falling into step behind a WOMAN in tight Levi's with a perfect ass. But then his eye catches an even more bewitching sight:

ANGLE - BUTCHER SHOP WINDOW

Several hanging carcasses capture his attention.

BACK TO WILL

He's stopped. Finds that he's gazing with longing at all that raw meat.

Finally, feeling absurd, Will forces himself away and continues on, downtown.

CUT TO:

INT. "MACLEISH HOUSE" CORRIDOR - NOON

Will steps off the elevator, starts down the hall. He passes Colleague 1, who AD LIBS a greeting. Will sniffs.

WILL

Snort with breakfast, Gary? Try scotch, easier on the gut than tequila.

He breezes past the startled Colleague 1, past the open door to Stewart's office.

STEWART

In another power-huddle with his production staff. Spotting Will, he gives his encouraging thumb's-up.

BACK TO WILL

His nose twitches, as he sniffs. Then he continues on, into:

INT. WILL'S OUTER OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Will strides in, grabs Mary's shoulders and gives his surprised assistant a buss on the cheek. Then, filling up on coffee, he bubbles:

WILL

Y'ever walk to work? On every block there's drama: jostling crowds, scavenging birds ... sex, death ... plus a fantastic amount of dogshit, even though there's a law ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY

We were worried, Mr. Randall ... Where
were you yesterday?

WILL

I don't know. Someplace cold. Good
to be back, Mary, good to be back.

Mary watches, perplexed, as her strangely revivified boss bounds into his office.

INT. WILL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

He's at his desk, working on the Mozart manuscript again, but today his hand is flying, he's like an Expressionist with a red pen, energetically crossing out paragraphs, jotting jagged notes in the margin ...

Roy wanders in. Watches, intrigued, as Will whips through another page with deft strokes.

ROY

Hey. Hurricane Boss. Never saw you work without your bifocals before.

Surprised, Will pats his face: It's true, no glasses, they're still in his shirt pocket. He takes them out, studies them, shrugs at Roy.

ROY

What're you, stoked on French Roast?

Will glances at his coffee cup: full, still. He's bemused.

WILL

Didn't have a drop.

(then)

I'll tell'ya what though, caught up on my sleep, grabbed twenty hours of shuteye, feel twenty years younger ... Plus this novel, Maude's best in awhile, you dive in and time flies, what is it, two-thirty, three?

ROY

(checks his watch)

Three forty-five.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL
You're joking.

He jumps up, grabs his sportcoat and hurriedly exits. Roy watches, somewhat weirded out.

INT. WILL'S OUTER OFFICE - WILL

pauses at Mary's desk to affectionately knead her shoulders.

WILL
See ya bright and early, Mary.

MARY
Where're you g--

WILL
Got a date with an angel.

He's halfway out the door, then pauses. Behind him:

MARY
Someone from Kirkus called. They want
to know whether you're staying, or
planning to set up shop elsewhere ...

But Mary's voice quickly FADES, at least in Will's consciousness, as we PUSH IN ON his FACE. Then REVERSE, on what he sees. And what he HEARS.

ANGLE STEWART

A small but distinct figure down the corridor, silhouetted in his doorway as he talks on the phone. Very quietly, yet somehow Will can make out (and so can we) his words.

STEWART
What concerns me? In all candor?
Simply that he's lost his hard-on,
forgive me, sir.

BACK TO SCENE

Mary, who's trailed off, watches her boss who stands frozen in the doorway.

She's struck by a weird sight: Will's ears have rammed forward. And the hair on the back of his neck, which looks distinctly thicker today, has risen up, like hackles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Now he turns back to her. Suddenly subdued, almost circumspect.

WILL

Take the rest of the day, if you want.
I'll see you tomorrow.

Then he lopes off, toward the elevator.

... -- CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

We start in CLOSE again on the syringe puncturing skin, as Will gets his second rabies shot. And HEAR:

WILL'S VOICE

Doc, what're the symptoms of rabies?

Now WIDE, as the Doctor thinks a moment, then responds:

DOCTOR

Fever, headache, vomiting ... Then restless excitement, muscle spasms, hallucinations ... Then trouble swallowing, foaming ... Then death.

WILL

Well I have felt restless excitement ... No trouble swallowing though, on my way to work I stopped in for two Egg McMuffins, still wanted one more. What about acute hearing? Enhanced sense of smell?

The Doctor gently withdraws the needle, swabs the site.

DOCTOR

It's not in the literature. Anyway you don't have rabies, Will, even if the dog was rabid --

WILL

(corrects)

The wolf.

DOCTOR

Even if, we caught it. All we've got to do now is finish the course of injections -- only three to go.

CONTINUED:

Will hops off the table, grabs his shirt. As he begins to button it up:

DOCTOR

Did you start doing push-ups, or sit-ups or something?

WILL

Not yet but I will, scout's honor.

DOCTOR

Because you look a little ... firmer.

WILL

(grins)

Well I feel firmer, Doc. And it's nice of you to say so.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK WEST - THAT EVENING

Will strides uptown on the park side (he's walked all the way home from the office) looking robust, buoyant and alert.

Women eye him, but he doesn't seem to notice; his attention is caught by a passing Priest, with a pair of ice-skates slung over his shoulder.

Now Will's reached 67th Street; his dash across CPW through heavy traffic is expertly judged.

DOORMAN

Evening, Mr. Randall, y'might consider crossing at the green. The cabbies get a bonus check for every road kill.

Will stops, smiles.

WILL

Thank you, Mikey, for passing along that little-known tidbit. And for caring about my ass.

Will thrusts a five spot into the surprised Mikey's jacket pocket, then continues on to the elevator.

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALL APARTMENT - EVENING

As Will enters, he bellows:

WILL

Charl, back from work? I want to play!

The answering machine is blinking. Will pushes play. HEARS:

CHARLOTTE'S VOICE

Just letting you know I made it to New -- --
Haven in one piece. These "How Do I
Sell To The Magazines" seminars are a
big jerk-off, but I'm back tomorrow.

End of message. Will sags: he'd completely forgotten.

NEXT MESSAGE

Hi guys, just confirming poker Friday
at eight, our place, dealer's choice
but no "Night Baseball," Will --

Will CLICKS OFF the machine.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Will finds ground beef in the fridge. He tears off half, throws it in a pan. As he watches it sizzle, he absently gnaws on the raw half, then drifts out while dinner cooks ...

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Looking for some music, Will scans the titles of his vast CD jazz collection. He can easily read the tiny print. With a laugh, he muses:

WILL

No goddam glasses.

TIME CUT. Monk's "Introspection" PLAYS. Will throws open the his-and-hers armoire, tugs on some chinos. Strikes a comic bare-chested "muscle" pose in the mirror: the 98-pound weakling turned Charles Atlas. Then grabs an old shirt.

Then freezes. Sniffs: his wife's blouse. Then a dress. Then he drops it and just stands here, statue-still for a moment, with the look of a man who's seen some kind of light.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Lovely three-story, ivy-covered brick facade. Will presses the BUZZER. Again, and again, and again, until --

-- the door is opened by STEWART, in a skimpy silk robe that emphasizes his can't-pinch-an-inch physique. Stewart's bafflement lasts only a beat, then he manages a big smile.

STEWART

Will!

INT. FOYER/STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Will steps inside. His nose is twitching again. Again, Stewart is thrown -- but only for a second.

STEWART

What brings you --

Will throws a punch which Stewart ducks -- the blow glances off his jaw, but gives Will the chance to get past his buff young protege, and start up the stairs. Stewart grabs Will's ankle, drags him back down a few steps, then forces him into a chokehold with a trace of pleasure.

STEWART

The hell do you mean, by --

With surprising strength, Will pries loose Stewart's right hand, yanks up the arm and bites his thumb's-up thumb! Stewart cries out, releasing his left hand, and Will now springs up the flight of stairs, past the home gym, past the home theater, only stopping when --

CHARLOTTE

-- Stewart? What's --

She's ventured out of the bedroom, half-naked. When she sees Will she instantly bursts into bitter tears.

Will stands here, staring at his wife, chest heaving.

CHARLOTTE

Oh Christ.

WILL

Jesus Christ.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Now Stewart is standing here, watching husband and wife stare at each other.

STEWART

(murmurs)

Oh my god.

Will turns, catching his eye. But nothing is said ... Now Will starts past Stewart, then shuffles down the stairs. Then walks out, the sound of the door SLAMMING shut.

A beat, and Stewart crosses to Charlotte, who's sat on the edge of the bed, gazing at the carpet, chewing a fingernail. He lightly touches her shoulder. Softly:

STEWART

I'm really sorry, baby.

Charlotte shrugs her shoulder, detaching his hand.

CHARLOTTE

Just ... don't touch me for a minute, okay?

CUT TO:

INT. RANDALLS' APARTMENT - NIGHT (LATER)

Will paces the foyer, muttering to himself, waiting for his wife to return, trying to decide what to do next. Now:

A MONTAGE

Will quickly packing. First, in:

THE BEDROOM. He stuffs clothes into a valise. Then crams in handfuls of favorite CD's. Then, into:

THE LIBRARY. He grabs books: The first three are Falconer, Lady With Lapdog and Swann's Way ...

The clothes, music, books are all he wants.

CUT TO:

INT. "MACLEISH HOUSE" - NEXT MORNING

Will charges in to his outer office, looking a little crazed but powerful, and charismatic too. Mary, surprised to see him in this state, is positively startled when he barks:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

Update your Rolodex, Mary: I've moved across the park, to the Stanhope.

MARY

Okay.

(then)

Why? What's happened?

WILL

Well I've had a little revelation. See, everything's the opposite of how it's supposed to be. The people you help, kick you in the teeth. The women you love, hold you in contempt. But that's okay, it's the way of the world, and I accept it.

Mary isn't sure how to respond. An awkward silence. And then she remembers:

MARY

Mr. Alden's office called yesterday, after you left. He wants to see you up at his estate this afternoon.

Will is excited by the news.

WILL

Really. What time?

MARY

(checks her desk)

Four, if that works for you.

WILL

It works, it works. If he was planning to pink-slip me, I'd get a pink slip. Watch: the worm is turning, Mary.

MARY

About fucking time, Mr. Randall.

CUT TO:

INT. STEWART'S OFFICE - MORNING (5 MINUTES LATER)

Stewart stares out the window, onto Union Square Park. Now a resolute KNOCK, and then Will walks in. Stewart whirls, defensive.

CONTINUED:

STEWART

Hello Will, I'm -- I'm not going to say something stupidly dramatic, like "I love your wife."

WILL

No.

STEWART

Or "forgive me." It'd be loathsome, to ask that.

WILL

Yes, we wouldn't want to behave badly.

Stewart throws up his hands.

STEWART

What do you want me to do? I'll do it. Resign, today? Promise never to see Charlotte again? Spell it out, and I'll abide by it: What do you want me to do?

WILL

There's a samurai tradition in which the disgraced warrior disembowels himself, then stomps on his intestines as they spill onto the floor. I'd enjoy watching you do that.

Stewart scowls.

STEWART

This is exactly your problem, Will: You've retreated from your wife, and from the world, behind some impenetrable facade of cool irony.

Will laughs.

WILL

You just went from prostration to condescension in a nanosecond. You're like one of those shape-shifters in the movies, the Terminator 1000, no true identity, just a mission to destroy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Stewart crosses his arms and sighs, cranky.

STEWART

Look, whatever problems you and Charlotte have had, are strictly between you. I've got no excuse. It's terrible, you're my mentor. Although I wonder if somehow that explains it. You know, Freud and Euripides, all that stuff about the primal drive to destroy one's "father" -- ... defile one's "mother" ... you know?

Will strains to stay composed in the face of this drivel.

WILL

First, the Oedipus cycle was written by Sophocles. Second, tragedy requires greatness. That doesn't apply here.

STEWART

(shrugs)

I don't pretend to noble stature. But at least I'm alive, I have plans, energy, my work hasn't shriveled along with my dick, I still get hard-ons ...

A beat as Will registers this.

WILL

You were talking to Alden, yesterday. About me ... That's what it all comes down to for you, you sick fuck. Who's got the hard-on. A cock-measuring contest ...

Stewart nods, vigorously.

STEWART

I have this problem, Will, I admit it. I'm hung like a horse and that affects my thinking. Plus I've always had a weakness about showing it off to women ... As you would too, I can assure you.

Will smiles, showing teeth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

Well, gosh. If you're as big as you say, Stew, then go fuck yourself and give the rest of us a break.

With that, Will turns and walks out.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALDEN ESTATE - LATE AFTERNOON

The Randalls' aging Volvo rattles up to the gate. The old florid gatekeeper (whose nametag reads "George") leans into the window.

GEORGE

Do you have an appointment, sir?

Will sports a five o'clock shadow that, along with his seen-better-days car, makes him appear somewhat shady. But despite the shocks of the past day, he's in an upbeat, expectant frame of mind.

WILL

Afternoon, George. I'm Will Randall, the editor-in-chief of Mr. Alden's new book publishing boutique. The great man asked to see me at four, so here I am, four on the dot.

George laughs, checks his log, then opens the gate.

GEORGE

Well good luck with Mr. Alden. He's not a bad boss, really ... He's from New Hampshire, you know.

WILL

Matter of fact I didn't. So what does that mean?

GEORGE

(with a twinkle)

Whatever the hell he wants it to.

Will laughs: Thanks, I get you. Then he drives onto the estate.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Predictably cavernous, with giant overstuffed couches and disturbing hunting trophies along the walls: The heads of various unlucky deer stare down, reprovingly. Alden and Will sit adjacent, though not very close, the old man sipping brandy between sentences.

ALDEN

I want you to think about Europe -- eastern Europe, particularly ... A -- whole new market is opening up there. Now god and currency willing, the entire continent will eventually cohere, not just economically, but culturally ... which is an opportunity we can barely glimpse, from here ...

By now he's noticed that Will doesn't seem to be listening -- instead, his gaze is nervously flicking from one mounted deer head to the next.

ALDEN

You're not on the board of the ASPCA?

Will shakes his head.

ALDEN

Vegetarian?

WILL

Nothing like that, sir.

ALDEN

You haven't touched your brandy.

WILL

Well ... Liquor hasn't tasted quite right to me, recently.

Alden nods. Drains his snifter, then reaches for Will's.

ALDEN

What's wrong, then? Am I boring you?

WILL

No ... You're firing me.

Alden doesn't deny it. He has a sip from Will's snifter, then:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALDEN

It's nothing personal, of course. I know you've done good work in the past. And you're clearly an individual, which I prize: You didn't clean up before coming to see me and I get a kick out of that. But this is a time -- not just in corporate America, but around the globe --

Will holds up a palm.

WILL

Really. Don't bother. I'm not upset, Mr. Alden, I imagine you've got dozens of people who could've made the call ... I admire the fact that you did it face to face.

ALDEN

Well I'm from New Hampshire. And that's how we do things.

Silence. Then, abruptly, Will stands. Thrusts out a hand. As the two men shake:

WILL

Pay reasonable advances, never stint on review copies, and treat your authors like they're human beings. Don't hold 'em to deadlines, they'll hand in rough drafts.

Alden nods. He looks touched.

ALDEN

Thanks, Will. I'll remember all that.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROUNDS - DUSK

Will wanders out of the mansion, a bit dazed. When he reaches the bottom of the stairs a Doberman is waiting. The guard dog sniffs Will, then growls.

Without breaking stride Will growls back, more guttural, more threatening than the Doberman -- who quickly turns tail and scampers off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Suddenly JOE has materialized beside Will -- a roving security man, not much younger than George, whose manner is low-key yet persuasive.

JOE

Excuse me, Sir, your car's parked in the other direction. Why don't I walk you there --

WILL

Actually I wasn't looking for my car. I was looking for Laura.

JOE

(skeptical, surprised)
She expecting you?

Will glances at his watch. Then, with a frown, lies:

WILL

Yes, and I'm late.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAURA'S COTTAGE - EARLY EVENING

Joe RAPS on Laura's door, without the romantic touch Will might have tried for. A BEAT. From inside, we HEAR:

LAURA'S VOICE

Coming ...

Laura opens the door. Casual in torn jeans, scuffed cowboy boots, untucked denim shirt, hair a mess ... in short, she looks glorious. And delighted, to find Will here.

LAURA

Hi.

JOE

Evening, Laura. I'll leave you two.

LAURA

Thanks, Joe.

As she waves goodbye to the guard we notice that she's wearing thin white gloves. Now she gestures Will inside.

CONTINUED:

LAURA

How great, that you're here. You don't know what a treat this is for me.

INT. COTTAGE - EARLY EVENING

A bit of a mess in here. Laura has been working in semi-darkness at her desk, crammed with 16-mm editing equipment and reels of film (thus the gloves). And there are bins with trims and outtakes, scattered. And mountains of video cassettes, and a percolating Mr. Coffee.

WILL

You're in the middle of something.

LAURA

I'm actually at the end of something.

WILL

Really, what?

LAURA

My rope. Hang on, let me just finish this one cut.

Will watches, impressed, as she eyeballs two pieces of film, then scissors them with confidence, then dexterously does a hot splice. Then peels off the gloves.

WILL

What is it?

LAURA

Oh, just my personal celluloid tar baby.

WILL

Home movies?

LAURA

(laughs)

Yes, if you live in Bosnia or Beirut.

She flicks on the light.

LAURA

You probably never saw it, but about five years ago I produced this little documentary about a massacre in a town called El Mozote, in El Salvador.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA (cont'd)

About eight-hundred civilians were mutilated, incinerated ... Everyone knew it was their army that did it, but no one here would admit it, because we trained them. The victims were mostly children.

WILL

Christ.

LAURA

Anyway it got shown at some festivals, I could never get it aired on TV --

WILL

Wonder why.

LAURA

But I figured that was the end of it, which was fine, 'cause I was going through some rough times emotionally --

WILL

Can imagine.

LAURA

Between the two years in San Salvador and the end of a shitty marriage ... But people who'd seen the film, or heard about it, started sending me their footage ... With video cameras, now, it's amazing how many raw images there are, around the world ... Every atrocity is caught by a Handycam, Saddam's poison gas attack on Halabja, Tienemen Square ... And it all seems to find its way to me, just last week I got some horrifying footage of shelling in Kiseljak, Muslim women trying to shield their babies... And for some reason I feel compelled to keep cutting it together, even though I know that nobody wants to see it, and if they saw it they still wouldn't believe it ...

Laura clicks off the light box on her cutting bench and claps her hands, dispelling the ghosts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

Anyway, fuck it. You're here. That's good! My father renewed your contract?

WILL

No, he fired my ass.

LAURA

Oh jesus. That's bullshit. Let me talk to him, he's actually scared of me.

WILL

No. I meant what I said, the other night: I don't care. More to life than books ... I'm frankly happy, to have the whole thing off my back.

Laura presumes he's just being brave. Nonetheless she smiles, shrugs, takes Will's arm.

LAURA

Okay, then, let's raid daddy's liquor cabinet, have ourselves a celebration.

CUT TO:

EXT. PATH - EVENING

A peaceful moment as they stroll together up to the mansion. Then, suddenly, Will tenses, his eyes wildly flick.

LAURA

-- What?

WILL

That sound -- what is it?

Laura stops, strains, but can't hear anything for a moment ... then she gradually perceives (as do we) a faint THWACK-THWACK that grows louder ... They're both looking up now, at a helicopter that's approaching a far corner of the estate.

LAURA

Ah. Clyde the dashing pilot, who flew Medevacs in Nam, as he likes to remind everyone ... Probably bringing in a nurse, to give Dad a dose of chemo ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

Oh, no. What's wrong with him? If you don't mind my asking ...

LAURA

Oh, that prostate thing, that all men get if they're lucky to live long enough.

They resume walking.

WILL

Well you gotta hand it to him: Sick as a dog, business as usual.

LAURA

(laughing, agrees)

Most people pop codeine to kill the pain. My dad swallows companies ... Anyway, it's why I'm back here, a few months, help see him through it.

WILL

Is there a Mrs. Alden?

LAURA

Way too many. Happily they've all headed for the hills. The original one -- my mom -- died when I was ten.

WILL

I'm sorry. Life kicks the shit out of everyone, huh?

CUT TO:

INT. STAFF KITCHEN - EVENING

Large and impersonal, with gigantic freezers, preparation tables, shelves stocked with dry goods, etc.

Will and Laura eat a plain but pleasant staff dinner: salmon, rice, vegetables. Will eagerly finishes off the fish, ignoring the other food groups. He starts to wash it down with wine, then immediately stops, no longer enjoying the taste. Laura picks up on this.

LAURA

A good boy suddenly? You've been sober ..?

CONTINUED:

WILL
I've been sober, I've been celibate ...

Off her bemused look, Will blurts:

WILL
My marriage ended, last night, with a bang. So to speak. My wife, and my ... my "protege."

LAURA
Sorry to hear it. But I'm afraid that sounds about right, who better to betray you than those you love and trust ...

Will hungrily eyes Laura's salmon, that she's hardly touched.

LAURA
But c'mon, when you could get away with it, like a man, you screwed around too ..?

WILL
(smiles, evasive)
Or, like a wolf, I mated for life.

Laura reaches for Will's wine. Will forks up a chunk of her fish. She thoughtfully sips. He enthusiastically chews.

LAURA
Do you have children? How are they taking this?

WILL
No.
(then, rote)
There's a daughter, Lisa, adopted. She was the offspring of two alcoholics -- her mother was a druggie, also -- and things started to go wrong when she turned fourteen. Lots of scenes, fights, defiance, looking for her at three a.m. in the East Village ... She was killing herself and us too, I actually sort of slapped her around one night, I was so desperate by then ... She ran away after that. We tracked her down a few

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

WILL (cont'd)

times, I flew out to L.A. once to get her ... Found her in Hollywood, just like in the TV movies. Various counselors and therapists have advised us to let it go, now. She's nineteen. She lives in Denver, in some kind of halfway house ... I send her money still, sometimes, probably shouldn't. But she hates us, never wants to see us again, she's made that very clear.

Laura looks mournful, almost sickened. She grips his hand.

LAURA

I want to say something to you that would matter, but I can't. C'mon, Will. Why don't we get some air ..?

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - EVENING

Will and Laura stand in a remote clearing, lit by the sun's last rays and the quarter moon above, in a clear purple sky. He squats down and gently, almost lovingly, pats the dirt.

WILL

Gorgeous spot.

LAURA

Yes, it's where I used to come to reread Catcher In The Rye, compose little folk songs about certain boys, and feel grotesquely sorry for myself.

Will lightly sniffs the ground. Looks up, quizzical.

WILL

And bury your pets ..?

Laura looks surprised, almost startled by Will's "guess."

LAURA

Yes. In little pine boxes. A rabbit, a hamster, two cats, I think ...

Will stands. Takes a breath. He's deciding whether to tell her. Now:

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Something happened to me a few days ago. I was driving, in New England, and I hit an animal.

LAURA

Oh god, it's awful isn't it? You just feel like a criminal in your big stupid car --

WILL

It was a wolf. And just before it died, I got this little nip.

He holds up his fingertip, with the band-aid.

LAURA

You get checked for rabies?

WILL

(nods)

Yes, but ... Listen: I feel like, maybe it somehow passed along a scrap of its soul, in my blood, or something ... I mean my senses have been tingling, not unpleasantly but it's strange ... For instance, standing here with you, I'm feeling hornier than a high-schooler.

LAURA

(flushes)

I like the concept. But I sort of doubt the libido of some wolf could be contagious.

Will nods: He doubts it too. But Laura, studying him in the dying light, can clearly see the disquiet written on his face.

LAURA

Look, Will, why don't you stay over? You get your own guest cottage ... I worry about you driving back to the city alone, you seem a little tired and out of it ...

Will looks somewhat embarrassed, now that the mystery's out in the open. But he inhales again, and is forced to admit:

WILL
It does smell better than Manhattan.
And no sirens, maybe I'll sleep ...

CUT TO:

EXT. GUEST COTTAGE - NIGHT

Laura leads Will inside a charming thatched-roof and stone house at the edge of the wood, out of a Grimm's fairy tale.

INT. GUEST COTTAGE - NIGHT

An awkward moment: Both stand here, looking at each other, then at the bed, wondering what might come next.

WILL
So ...

LAURA
So ... You're smart and funny and wonderfully fucked up -- wacko that I am, I'm actually stirred by your wolf story -- but, I ... I dunno, I guess I've been ...

WILL
Burned, by men?

LAURA
Immolated.

WILL
(laughs)
We're quite a pair, of walking wounded.

LAURA
Life kicks the shit out of everyone,
huh?

Will laughs.

WILL
Well, let me at least walk you back to your place.

LAURA
No need. There's Dobermans, guards, cameras, trip-wires, punji sticks ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Will laughs again.

LAURA

Now get some rest, you're no spring chicken.

A sudden quick kiss on the cheek, then Laura turns and walks out. Will finds himself watching her ass as she disappears into the dark.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT (5 MINUTES LATER)

Will inspects his face in the mirror. He does look tired. Worse, his features seem a bit coarser now, the jaw heavier, though perhaps it's only the thickening beard. Will removes the latest band-aid: his wound is healed, but the hair, grown in again, looks eerie, almost alarming. There is a dop kit here, for him; Will wets his fingertip, then takes the razor and carefully shaves off the little thatch of hair.

INT. BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

Will tosses, in bed. Sleep seems remote. No sirens, but other sounds -- natural ones, birds, dogs, horses, and somehow they beckon him ...

He climbs out of bed, paces, looks around for some distraction. There's the requisite little library: Moby Dick, Frankenstein, Midsummer Night's Dream ... Will grabs a volume at random, rifles through the pages, but midnight reading is hopeless.

Will starts to dress.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAURA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Will stands outside her window, staring in through the blinds. She's lying there, asleep, in darkness, but we sense that Will can see her. His breathing deepens, accelerates, for a second we feel he's going to shatter the glass with his fists and burst in ...

Instead he backs away from the window ... another step, and then he turns, begins to run ... swiftly, into the night ...

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - LATE NIGHT (LATER)

Will has strayed far from any path. He travels -- fleet, hunched -- across beds of crunchy leaves and pine needles ... not sure why he's here, where he's going, drawn by an unfathomable sense ... He stops at a patch of moss, digs it up, shoves it in his mouth.

Suddenly a shadow darts out of its cover, nearby -- a deer. And Will is moving, in pursuit, his legs powerful and sure ... We glimpse his expression, half of him enthralled by the hunt, the other half horrified: I'm chasing a deer! He nearly runs into a tree trunk, then feints around it -- it's where the deer had frozen -- and now the race resumes, but Will is running out of breath, slipping on the damp forest floor, the deer is escaping ...

Now it slows, circles, stops. Looks left and right, but it's alone ... When suddenly, from a rock formation above, Will jumps down, landing on it, toppling it, tearing with his teeth at the deer's hind leg, its tendon ...

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

Will stirs, out of a deep sleep. He'd been curled up in a ditch, lined with leaves, clutching a femur. Coming back to consciousness, Will struggles to shake off what seemed like a feral dream ... but it was no dream, and he slowly rises, repelled by the stripped bone, casting it away. Will's own bones creak as he gets to his feet -- either a sign of advancing middle age, or else his skeleton is changing ... Will scans for a path and then, spying one, starts for it, a bit dizzy ... Beyond the path, he now sees, is a stream ...

CUT TO:

EXT. GUEST COTTAGE - NOON

Will's Volvo has been brought down to his cottage, parked alongside. Now Laura comes down the path with a tray, late breakfast for two. She knocks. No answer. A beat. She tries the door.

INT. COTTAGE - NOON

Laura uncertainly enters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

Will ..?

Strange, nobody home.

CUT TO:

EXT. DINER - NEXT MORNING

Will stands in a phone booth. His clothes have dried, the blood mostly rinsed out. His face is grizzled with a thick beard, four or five days' worth, in normal terms. He dials an old number, automatic. On the other end we HEAR:

ROY'S VOICE

MacLeish House, Mr. Prawl speaking.

Will's voice sounds hoarse, detached, oddly uninflected.

WILL

Roy, could you come pick me up. I
need ... fresh clothes.

(feels his jaw)

And a razor.

ROY'S VOICE

Will! They said you'd left Alden's,
without your car! Where the hell are
you! For two day's we've been --

Will peers at the diner's sign: Poughkeepsie Diner & Grill.

WILL

Poughkeepsie. Diner & Grill.

ROY'S VOICE

I'll be two hours. Wait right there.

CUT TO:

INT. ROY'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Roy, driving back to the city, shoots a dubious glance at Will, who's staring out the window, stubbly jaw slightly agape, watching cars as they speed past Roy's vintage VW Bug.

ROY

Alden canned you, you drank your way
up the Hudson, who could blame you,
punched some jerk in the nose ... I'm

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROY (cont'd)
just idly hypothesizing here, notice
I'm not asking any questions, Mystery
Boss.

Will manages a weak chuckle.

WILL

That's good, 'cause I don't have any
answers.

ROY

Me neither. But I do have the merest
glimmering of a very vague idea.

Will rubs his temples, then the bridge of his nose, trying
to rouse himself back to alertness.

WILL

... Yeah? What ..?

ROY

Mary and I did some digging, while you
were away. Guess what? The Alden
deal's not closed, not completely.

WILL

... What're you talking ..?

ROY

Yes, in principle, both parties agree.
But as of yesterday, no one's put any
signatures on any documents yet.

Will sits up a bit straighter. Rubs his eyes, smooths his
hair. Pulls down the sun visor, studies his grizzled visage.

WILL

Roy: You brought a razor?

ROY

Brought one, per your request. Though
frankly I think you'll need two.

EXT. HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

As Roy's Beetle bounces down the Taconic toward Manhattan,
we HEAR Will's hearty, throaty LAUGH.

CUT TO:

INT. MACLEISH HOUSE CORRIDOR - LATE AFTERNOON

Roy steers Will -- shaved and changed, his spaciness supplanted by a strange new intensity -- to his office.

As they pass Stewart's door, Will's younger rival looks up from his desktop, to trade stares ...

INT. WILL'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Will has just finished dialing a number. Roy and Mary watch, both pacing with nervous excitement as, into the phone:

WILL

... Maude? It's Will. Listen ... How would you like to be part of a great revolutionary movement, the workers taking over the factory?

This factory, this goddam book factory. Which is all it is, our genteel pretensions notwithstanding. C'mon, sweetie, remember '68, we first met, it's all we'd talk about ..? "Seizing the levers of production," "Expropriating the expropriators." And we weren't even on drugs ...

Well I wasn't.

I'm talking about the deal. It ain't done, Alden doesn't own a single book-jacket yet. Meantime we build a war chest by the weekend, then go straight to Mrs. MacLeish and make our very own offer.

You, me, and every writer I've ever published, still living, who has a spare hundred-thou to kick in. Or more.

Yes it is very Mickey-and-Judy-let's-put-on-a-show-in-the-barn. But Jesus Christ, Maude, we've got nothing to lose but our chains. And a world to win. A world of royalties, book club rights, mass market rights, movie rights ... a heftier slice of the pie, Maude, I'm talking more dough!

Of course, I'll take a check. Catch you later.

CONTINUED:

Will hangs up, then shrugs: that was easy. Roy and Mary let out two joyous SCREAMS.

MARY

You were wonderful, Mr. Randall, all that "seizing" and "expropriating" ...

ROY

How can you remember that shit?

WILL

It's like riding a bike, Roy, these are the phrases that first got me laid.

By now, several curious younger Editors and Assistants have gathered in the doorway to see what's going on. With a smile, Will tells them:

WILL

Things are changing fast, kids. We're installing a dictatorship of the proletariat around here. And until the worker's state withers away, I'm the boss.

There are numerous amused replies of "Yes boss."

Satisfied, Will turns back to Mary and Roy as he grabs the receiver again.

WILL

So: Who do we hit up next?

CUT TO:

INT. STANHOPE HOTEL ROOM - EVENING (LATER)

Will's on the phone, pacing. There is one uneaten steak and a pile of stripped t-bones on a plate, and one bone clenched in his free hand which he waves, gesticulating, as:

WILL

I'd drive up there but I'm back in the game, don't tell daddy but I'm making an end run around him, for the house.

INT. LAURA'S COTTAGE - SAME TIME

INTERCUT. She'd come out of the shower to answer the phone, is now toweling dry.

CONTINUED:

WILL

It's gonna be a cross between Sweden and United Artists. But without the high suicide rates or "Pink Panther" series ...

LAURA

(laughs)

I'm not exactly sure what you're talking about, but not only won't I warn my father, I'll spell you for cash if you need any extra.

WILL

Thanks but I want your body, not your money. Can't you come down? I'm across from the Met, five blocks from a leather bar on Lex, whatever turns you on, Laura ...

As Laura responds, she idly picks up a book she's bought, that was by her bedside, titled Disorder, Delusion and Dementia. And thumbs through it again ...

LAURA

First, I'm not a fan of men who mysteriously disappear in the morning. Not at this stage of my life, anyway. Second, you've been separated from your wife for, what? Three days now?

WILL

Who cares how many days?

LAURA

I do. How does the old joke go? "The divorce didn't work out" ...

WILL

Screw old jokes, we're past old jokes. Since I met you I've never felt clearer, more in control.

Laura, who hasn't missed the manic edge in Will's tone, takes pains to sound casual, not clinical, as she inquires:

LAURA

But is it me, or the wolf? Which, do you think, has revitalized you?

CONTINUED:

WILL

You, dammit. And finish drying. The sound of that towel's driving me nuts.

Laura is incredulous. She stares, open-mouthed, at the phone. Some kind of trick ..?

LAURA

You can hear me rubbing my skin with a towel?

WILL

Do you have to be so excitingly graphic? It's one of my new gifts. So what about it, Laura? If not tonight, tomorrow night?

LAURA

(a beat, then)

Tomorrow at seven. You better be there. And you have twenty-four hours to think up a reason why you ran out on me. And it better be good.

WILL

I will be, and it will be. And --

But she's already hung up.

Will hangs up too. Then, intoxicated, starts to sing the Johnny Mercer chestnut (from the Otto Preminger film):

WILL

"Laura
Is the face in the misty light ..."

Then abruptly stops, as he catches sight of his reflection in the mirror. His hairline is lower, fuller.

To distract from this disturbing sight, he CLICKS on the TV with one hand, grabs the remaining steak with the other. As he bites into the sinewy meat with unsettling gusto, the TV picture flares to life: It's an ad for the Hair Club.

Will laughs, curses, grabs the remote. CLICKS to a "Wild Kingdom"-type documentary, some hapless animal blundering into a trap. Quick CLICK. As he channel surfs, Will allays his mounting anxiety with a rude running commentary, e.g.:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

(click: old movie)

Mm, they had faces then -- asses too, c'mon, show us that caboose as you pull out of the station, "bigger the cushion, better the pushin'" --

(click: floorwax ad)

Bend over and wax me, baby ... aim that delicious derriere, rapturous rump, cuddly crack at the camera --

Now Will CLICKS to a Chuck Jones cartoon from the Forties: A wolf in spats ogles a shapely babe who's undulating past, the wolf's eyeballs grotesquely distended out to here.

Will stares at the screen for a moment, frozen by the shock of recognition. Abruptly he clicks OFF the TV, then crosses to the closet, grabs his best (summer) suit --

CUT TO:

EXT. STANHOPE HOTEL - LATE NIGHT

Will emerges, spiffy as a Southern lawyer in white linen. He inhales deeply, then starts across the street ...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - LATE NIGHT

Several GANG GUYS lounge at the entrance. The bored alpha male rises to challenge Will.

ALPHA

Hey. Cocksucker.

Will, surprised, looks behind him for the cocksucker. But the street is empty.

ALPHA

I was talking to you. You're a cocksucker, aren't you?

WILL

Not that I'm aware of. Maybe in a dream once. Why do you ask?

ALPHA

I ask, because cocksuckers spread disease, they spread death in case you don't know, they're like fucking vermin and they need to be found, and they need to be punished, with a stick.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He reaches up to the maple tree that's standing adjacent and threateningly snaps off a thick branch.

WILL

Well, then, let's find one.

There is a bench nearby, made of planks bolted into concrete. Will grips the front plank and mightily pulls, freeing it. His "stick" is a good six feet long.

WILL

And let's punish the sonovobitch.

But the gang guys have already scattered, Alpha in the lead.

Will watches them go, dropping the plank. Then turns, places a hand on the rim of the five-foot stone fence, and vaults over it, seemingly without effort, into Central Park.

TIME CUT:

Will crosses the eerie, empty bandshell area. Nearing Bethesda Fountain, he spots a squirrel ... He gives chase, the fleeing squirrel leading Will up to the lake ... Will stands here a moment -- hunched, motionless -- then abruptly reaches into the water and comes up with a writhing little fish! As he examines it he HEARS, from behind him:

WOMAN'S VOICE

Nice hands ...

Will turns. Sees two skinny young HOOKERS of color, heavily painted. He throws back the fish, and approaches.

HOOKER 1

Looking for action?

WILL

Looking for love in action, to borrow a phrase from Mother Teresa.

HOOKER 1

For fifty bucks I let you jump my bones, in the bushes over there.

Will appraises her.

WILL

It's a generous offer but I think I'd get puncture wounds, you're painfully thin if you don't mind my saying.

HOOKER 1

(affronted)

I don't got AIDS, I'm fashionable,
it's called "svelte," motherfucker.

WILL

I wasn't implying you were ill.

(sniffs)

But you are having your period.

HOOKER 1

(amazed)

You're weird.

Will resumes walking, farther west. The hookers follow.

HOOKER 2

What about me?

Still in motion, Will stares at her and sniffs, again.

WILL

You're a man.

HOOKER 2

(grins)

That's why god created blowjobs.

WILL

(laughs)

Good point. Still, I pass.

Hooker 2 looks a bit crestfallen. Will grabs "her" hand.

WILL

Tellya what, though: Can I have this
dance?

He begins to do a dapper psuedo-Fred Astaire step around
one, then the other, that has both hookers in stitches ...

Suddenly a squad car looms! There's no time to split; Will
and the hookers freeze, the hookers vainly striving to
assume innocent-looking postures.

The car stops. The cops step out and survey our dubious
trio. Cop 1 is heavyset, sweaty and frankly irritable.

CONTINUED:

COP 1

The fuck do we have here, Tony Orlando and Dawn?

WILL

I know how it looks, Officers: you think these ladies are pros. In fact they're amateur naturalists, they've taken me out for a late walk through these woods.

Will nods at one hooker, then the other.

WILL

She's pointing out the flora, she's pointing out the fauna.

COP 2

Shut the fuck up or we take you in too.

Will protectively draws the two hookers closer to him.

WILL

I'll have to ask you not to use filthy language in front of my women-friends.

The Cops exchange looks.

COP 1

You're laboring under a misimpression. Those are not "women," there. Those are cunts. And, since you're about an inch away, that makes you an asshole.

Will nods, thoughtfully. Then sniffs. Now, to the heavyset Cop 1:

WILL

Speaking of which ... Is that an inexpensive cologne you're wearing, or Preparation H?

Cop 2 pulls out a pair of cuffs.

COP 2

Put your fuckin' hands behind you.

Will smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

Say "please," you little blue prick.

The hookers bolt.

Cop 1 growls, and savagely jabs Will in the abdomen with his nightstick. Instead of doubling over, Will growls back -- far more convincingly -- and grabs the nightstick away, then flings it into the bushes. As Cop 2 advances, Will yanks the handcuffs free, slashing at his chest, knocking him back with a cry. Cop 1 reaches for his gun, has time to take off the safety before Will squeezes his hand and pulls, twists -- the gun hits the ground, Cop 1 SCREAMS.

Will bolts toward Strawberry Field, pausing to howl.

CUT TO:

INT. "MACLIESH HOUSE" CORRIDOR - NEXT MORNING

Will strides in, still wearing the linen suit, looking a bit rumpled and grizzled but not bad for a guy who's evidently been up all night, doing what we've seen Will doing and god knows what else.

INT. WILL'S OUTER OFFICE - MORNING

Mary looks tense. But in his high spirits, Will doesn't notice.

WILL

'Morning, Mary, any MIA writers return?

She's got a handful of phone slips.

MARY

They all called back, every one.

WILL

Perfect. It's a perfect world.

MARY

Plus your doctor, who sounded upset -- you missed your appointment yesterday?

Will waves this away, starts into his office. Mary stops him with a hand on his shoulder. Whispers:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY
He's in there, waiting for you.

WILL
(surprised)
My doctor?

MARY
(shakes her head)
Mr. Alden.

Will makes a face -- what now? Then squares back his shoulders, and walks into:

INT. WILL'S OFFICE - MORNING

As if his mere presence weren't disarming enough, Alden has seated himself behind Will's desk. He was studying the photo of the smiling 12-year-old.

ALDEN
Pretty girl. Your daughter?

WILL
(nods)
About seven years ago. Maybe the last time I remember her smiling like that. Life hasn't been kind to her, and I haven't been of much help, I'm afraid.

Alden clucks, sympathetic, as he sets the photo back down.

ALDEN
Daughters. I've got two. You think they'll be easier than sons. At least they won't want motorcycles and tattoos. But now they want everything.

WILL
It's a thrill to have you here sir, but I'm sure you didn't come in to discuss the pitfalls of parenting.

ALDEN
You're right, of course. This is Mr. Keyes, my general counsel.

He gestures at the far corner. There's a MAN seated in the shadows whom Will hadn't noticed, distinguished but tough, the Harvard Club via Hell's Kitchen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KEYES

Mr. Randall. Nice to meet you. It's come to our attention, through certain channels, that you're thinking about making your own offer, for the house.

WILL

What did Stewart say, exactly?

Keyes looks to Alden.

ALDEN

Look, we know you've been riling up your stable of --

WILL

They're authors, not horses. You've already forgotten.

ALDEN

Funny how the dream of a workers' paradise just won't die. Of course it's a joke, but a good one, Keyes and I had ourselves a big laugh.

WILL

Actually I'm not kidding, Mr. Alden.

ALDEN

Neither am I. So here's my final offer. We fire the other guy -- Stewart? -- and keep you on instead, as editor-in-chief.

Will nods. He's thinking.

KEYES

Same terms as Swinton negotiated with us. We just take his contract, white out his name, ink in yours.

ALDEN

An easy win, Will. What do you say?

Finally, Will decides.

WILL

You know what? I like my plan. So do my writers. Thanks all the same. Can I walk you guys to the elevator?

INT. CORRIDOR - MORNING (A MINUTE LATER)

Will escorts Alden and his lawyer down the hall.

ALDEN

You've got more cojones than your friend gave you credit for. Maybe you deserve more dough.

KEYES

Say, Stewart's base salary plus twenty percent, plus a five-percent increase in profits?

Will laughs, as he rings for the elevator.

WILL

This is beautiful, I believe in Santa Claus again. But my decision stands.

The car door opens, Alden and Keyes step on.

ALDEN

Sleep on it, Will. I like you, I'd like to work with you.

Then he adds, with a big smile:

ALDEN

But stay away from Laura, or I'll break your fucking knees.

The elevator closes. Will stares at the doors. Murmurs:

WILL

Real sweetheart.

Then turns, to go back to his office. And runs smack into:

STEWART

I don't know what kind of shit you're trying to pull, Will, but --

WILL

I'm not trying to pull shit, Stewart. I don't pull shit. You see I'm an editor, a sort of handmaiden of literature ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART

You're a fucking black hole. You know what a black hole is? It's a star, that collapsed. And every day gets denser and smaller, and sucks light ... You're this shrunken ball of self-pity and passive aggression ...

He trails off because of a curious sound, a weird sensation. Like a stream of water somewhere, below him. Stewart looks down. His eyes widen.

WHAT HE SEES

Will is pissing on his pantleg, splashing his loafers.

BACK TO SCENE

Stewart backs off, livid.

STEWART

Not only are you going to get a major dry-cleaning bill, you miserable shit, but I am going to kick your ass in an unforgettable way.

Will puts away his manhood, OUT OF FRAME. Then pinches Stewart's cheek -- a bit roughly, to judge by the red mark.

WILL

Regards to the little woman.

With that he leaves Stewart, speechless, and walks back to his office.

INT. WILL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON (A MOMENT LATER)

As Will reenters, Roy is waiting here, expectant.

ROY

... Well?

WILL

He offered to put me in charge.

ROY

And? You said?

Will shrugs, shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROY

But it's a no-brainer! A slam dunk!

WILL

I hate both those expressions. And besides, I'm a proletariat dictator now, not a capitalist stooge, remember?

Roy is bewildered, at a loss.

WILL

Let's get a message to the media, a press release about our glorious nonviolent uprising. Got a pen?

Roy doesn't. Will pats his breast pocket. Hears an odd CLANK. Pulls out the pair of handcuffs. Stares, blankly.

ROY

Whoa. And not even single for a week.

But now Will's face has darkened. He looks ill, as he backs to the door.

WILL

Excuse me, a moment.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Will rushes in, heads straight for a toilet stall. Locks the door behind him, breathing hard.

INT. STALL - WILL

reaches into a pant pocket. And pulls out:

TWO FINGERS. A man's, turning purple, NYPD ring ...

By concentrating on steady breathing, Will manages to not throw up. He drops the fingers into the toilet and flushes. Then falls to his knees, as though praying to the porcelain. Softly, fervently, voice thick with feeling, and with panic:

WILL

Oh God, please ... Make it stop, I'll do anything I'll be good, please God --

Now he HEARS the bathroom door open, FOOTFALLS ... Someone normal, someone decent, no doubt ... Will pulls himself upright, pulls himself together, enough to leave the toilet stall, at least ...

INT. WILL'S OUTER OFFICE - MORNING

As Will reenters, Roy is excitedly pacing.

ROY

What about this? "Rumors of MacLeish House's demise as an independent, writer-dedicated organism have been greatly exaggerated."

Will looks at him vaguely: what are you talking about? Roy notes with confusion that his boss is now -- suddenly -- grimly subdued, and that his face is glazed with sweat.

ROY

The opening sentence ..? Of the press release ..?

Will nods: that's right. Then softly, without inflection:

WILL

Roy, I ... I have to go now. And fix "writer-dedicated organism."

ROY

Okay. But -- when'll you -- when --

WILL

Tomorrow. Yes ... I'll -- see you.
(then)
If I didn't come back you could do it.

ROY

Do what --? What're you talking --

WILL

You could be editor-in-chief.

ROY

What are you talking about, didn't come back!? What kind of joke --?

Will shakes his head: No joke. Roy looks panicked.

ROY

I'm HIV positive, f'r godsakes Will --

WILL

You're alive, Roy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He goes to his desk, takes his lunch-pail, hands it to Roy.

WILL

It was my dad's. He was a good man.
Strong, courageous ... like you.

Roy is speechless as Will gently pats his shoulder.

Then turns around, and leaves his office.

-- -- CUT TO:

EXT. BROADWAY - AFTERNOON (LATER)

Will wanders uptown, in a tragic daze. His eyes fall on a Post headline: **Cops Mauled by Wild Man!** He nearly collides with a hard-charging businessman, then stumbles on ...

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Will enters, relieved at the prospect of locking himself away from the world. And is startled anew to find CHARLOTTE, seated almost primly at the edge of his bed.

CHARLOTTE

You look a bit strange. Not bad, just different. I knew you wouldn't see me, had to slip a maid fifty bucks.

WILL

How sad, fucking Stewart set you back fifty bucks.

CHARLOTTE

As if you never ... strayed.

WILL

At that ABA convention in Anaheim, '79, you stayed home with the flu. At Rutgers, ten years ago, after speaking on "Sexism in Fiction." Twice, I did. But not with someone you knew, someone who was sabotaging your life's work while he was screwing your spouse.

Charlotte looks stunned. Will moves to the phone, finds Laura's number on a notepad. As he dials:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE

I know it's a hell of a way to pay you back, after nursing me through everything. But be honest, Will: Did we ever get the passion back, after I pulled through? I've been thinking hard about it ... Maybe I needed someone who never knew me as a cancer patient ...

Will's listening to the phone RING and RING: nobody home. He curses softly, hangs up and turns back to Charlotte.

WILL

Save it for your devoted readers. But please don't use that sickening pop-psych babble on your husband, as a smokescreen for fucking around.

His voice goes husky, almost a visceral threat. Charlotte's tone turns soft, placating. She tries another tack.

CHARLOTTE

I heard about what you're trying, at MacLeish. I think it's wonderful and risky, the most thrilling thing you've done in years. I'm planning to talk to some friends at the Times, get them to run something sympathetic ...

WILL

But that might piss off your boyfriend.

CHARLOTTE

(harsh laugh)

Him? It's over. A mistake, it meant nothing, less than your two. I'm going to tell him, later. Will, don't sixteen years mean anything to you?

Will begins anxiously pacing, trying to damp down a rage that's quickly rising inside him.

WILL

Those years meant a lot to me. I could ask you the same question but it's too late. You can't call something a "mistake" if you've done it over and over ... A mistake is when

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL (cont'd)
you run a red light or play a wrong
card ... So I'm going to ask you,
Charlotte, as politely as I can, to
leave this hotel room now. Right now.

Charlotte is already at the door.

CHARLOTTE

He's five times the man you'll ever be
you smug bastard.

WILL

I can live with that.

Sensing that Will can't restrain his temper much longer,
Charlotte flees. Will stares at the door. HOLD, then:

INT. BATHROOM - WILL

turns on the shower -- scalding hot -- then chokes back a
harsh sob as he starts to strip, to wash away his sins ...

CUT TO:

EXT. STANHOPE HOTEL - NIGHT (LATER)

Laura enters, looking apprehensive and lovely.

INT. STANHOPE - LAURA

On the house phone to Will, who sounds curiously detached.

WILL'S VOICE

I tried to call, tell you not to come.

LAURA

Well I'm here. Are you kidding me?

WILL'S VOICE

No, it's ironic, but ... what you said
last night, about my wife and me?
We're trying to patch it up, I'm sorry.

LAURA

Don't be.

She hangs up. Stands here, pensive, then starts for the
door. Then stops. Something feels peculiar. Laura goes to
the Front Desk, forces a smile, tells the Desk Clerk:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

This is very silly, but ... I left something in my room. And my room key. I'm in 603.

As the Desk Clerk signals for a Bellhop:

DESK CLERK

You're staying with Mr. Randall? There's a bunch of phone messages he hasn't picked up.

LAURA

I'll take them.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A Bellhop opens Will's door. Two bucks, and he disappears.

INT. WILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

It's dark. Laura waits for her eyes to adjust, calling:

LAURA

... Will ..?

Then Will's VOICE which sounds a bit flat, dulled by fear.

WILL

Please. Go away.

Laura parts the curtains, letting in some city light. Now she sees Will, showered and changed, huddled in the corner.

LAURA

Jesus Christ, what's going on?

WILL

I tried to call you, tell you not to come.

LAURA

I've been in town all afternoon. Talking, to ... someone.

As she crosses, she holds out the handful of phone messages.

LAURA

Your doctor's been trying to reach you. "You haven't come in for your next shot. Urgent." Your rabies shot?

(CONTINUED)

Will laughs, without any humor, at what now seems to him the utter irrelevance of his rabies treatment.

Crouching, Laura sees that he's locked himself with the police handcuffs to a radiator pipe.

LAURA
What is this?

WILL
Handcuffs.

LAURA
I know. Why?

Will doesn't answer. Laura prompts:

LAURA
Why don't you give me the key ..?

Will explains -- stiving mightily to be patient, "rational," masking his humiliation:

WILL
If I could just hand you the key, then there wouldn't be much point in my locking myself up, would there --?

Laura strokes his shoulder, trying to comfort him.

LAURA
Then tell me where the key is. So I can ... unshackle you, and we can go get some dinner, talk about whatev--

WILL
I already ate.

He nods at an area a few yards away, littered with empty plates and stripped t-bones. Laura tries to cover her alarm.

LAURA
Y'oughta ease up on that, Will, that's a lot of cholesterol, and fat --

WILL
"How did they finally destroy Willie the Wolf?" "They drove a t-bone steak through his heart."

CONTINUED:

LAURA

You're not turning into a wolf. Will, listen to me ... I had a breakdown, a few years ago. For awhile I couldn't leave my bedroom. I felt the world was ending, nuclear war or something worse than I couldn't name ... Some of it had to do with these sleeping pills I'd been taking, as it turned out ...

Will is just staring ahead, trying to breathe evenly. Laura isn't even sure whether he's listening.

LAURA

Are you on anything? Any drugs, that might --

WILL

No.

LAURA

Any history in your family, of --

WILL

No.

Laura takes a breath, herself. She doesn't want to push too hard. After a beat, she gently asks:

LAURA

Would you tell me exactly what you're feeling?

Suddenly, almost startlingly, Will comes alive. He turns to her, eyes glittering, and animatedly bursts out with:

WILL

I smell everything! There are nine million stories in the naked city, and most of them stink. I hear things, too, people's lousy secrets ... If I don't shave three times a day I look less trustworthy than Nixon. I have nocturnal memory loss, I may have attacked two cops last night --

LAURA

And you're afraid you might attack me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Will doesn't answer; he doesn't have to.

LAURA

Where's the key? You threw it somewhere ..?

Will remains stubbornly silent. Laura begins searching the room for it.

LAURA

Let's say for argument's sake you are --- becoming a wolf. There's no reliable record, in modern American history, of a wolf attacking a human. Did you know that? I've been reading about wolves. Here, goddamn it.

She's found the key, lying gleaming in the carpet where it meets the far wall. She moves toward Will with it, intent on liberating him. She kneels before him.

WILL

Don't. Laura ... I ... especially at night, I think I'm dangerous.

LAURA

Or delusional, "a somatic delusion of metamorphosis."

WILL

(crooked smile)

Bad girl. You've been talking to a shrink.

LAURA

(nods)

The one who helped me, don't worry, I didn't mention your name ... She says it's a healthy sign, that you're scared of what's happening to you, that's called "ego dystonic," it suggests that you're not crazy --

WILL

But there's something wrong with me, with my head, something organic? You're not turning into a wolf, calm down, Will, it's just a malignant brain tumor --?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

Well, she thinks it's a good idea to go in for a CAT scan, an MRI maybe ...

WILL

(sighs)

So that's why you're here, to take me to some high-priced clinic ...?

LAURA

No, I'm here for this.

She surprises him with a deep impassioned kiss. When it's over, and Will has caught his breath:

WILL

What do you want to prove? That I'm not contagious, or you're not scared?

Laura unbuttons his shirt, that stays partly on because of the handcuffs.

LAURA

You're the one, Mated-For-Life, should be scared to fool around with me ...

WILL

(laughs)

Right, the Slut of Swarthmore.

LAURA

Bennington. More boys.

She kisses him again, hard. By the time they break apart he's given in. He moans, hoarse:

WILL

You're lovely. I want to see you. Naked in the moonlight.

LAURA

(laughs)

I think it's a streetlight, but it'll have to do.

She unbuttons her blouse, unhooking her bra, then letting Will, with his free hand, tug it off. Instantly his mouth is upon one, then the other, nipple; he's frantically suckling, a starved whelp. When this gets painful, Laura tilts Will's head away from her breasts. And huskily chides:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

You had supper. I haven't, yet --

Then she pushes Will back, unzipping his pants, pulling them down, then his shorts, now it's her turn to dine on him. At the same time, she works to take off her slacks. (NOTE: All this is in deep shadow, only fleeting glimpses of flesh.)

WILL

Turn around.

LAURA

Who's giving orders, darling?

Will is grabbing at her, desperate for her but awkward as an adolescent, thanks to the cuffs.

LAURA

I want you free.

She unlocks him, tossing away the hardware with a ceremonial flourish. But what happens, after, is all instinct and animal frenzy.

DISSOLVE:

An hour later. The lovers have pounded and writhed their way around the room, leaving a wreck like a hurricane's wake. Laura and Will are half-in, half-out of the bathroom amid twisted towels, strewn sheets ... Now she struggles to her feet, sagging at the sink, splashing cold water on herself, then at Will curled around her ankles.

The bracing water revives him, bringing him up onto his knees where he starts to forcefully nuzzle Laura's ass. She laughs, then moves away, out of the bathroom.

LAURA

That's enough, Will, my god.

He follows her out, lurching upright with a creak of his bones -- it's almost more natural now to move on all fours. She has to turn and fend him off as he tries to embrace her.

WILL

Laura --

LAURA

Down boy. It was amazing but I'm shot now, my knees are raw, I'm sore ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Will responds with a grin that is a tad on the toothy side.

WILL

Poor baby. Where does it hurt?

He starts kissing her, moving from her breasts down, as she crosses to his collection of CD's piled atop the minibar.

LAURA

C'mon ... Let's put on something to --
settle down by ... Will ... What's
your favorite sort-of quiet thing?

As Will looks at his jazz collection, Laura takes the opportunity to cloak herself in a sheet. But when she turns back to Will to see what he's chosen, he's still standing here, blankly staring at the CD's.

LAURA

What's wrong?

He turns to her -- embarrassed, bewildered. Tries to cover:

WILL

I, ah, don't have any preference ...
Why don't you put on what you want ...?

Laura sifts, finds Coltrane's Ballads; it seems a good bet. Puts it in the CD player. As "Say It (Over and Over Again)" starts up, Laura takes Will in her arms -- but chastely now, he holding onto her for comfort, a frightened child.

DISSOLVE:

Perhaps two more hours have passed; Ballads has long ended. Will and Laura lie in bed, in the darkness, in silence. She is exhausted, deeply asleep. He is awake. That is, some urge has awakened in Will, that he cannot control. He climbs out of bed and begins to furtively dress, in shadow.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - LATE NIGHT

Will, alone out here, skulks across the avenue toward Central Park, perhaps beyond ... FADE OUT.

FADE IN ON:

CLOSE - SHOES

We recognize Will's shoes, which are caked with mud. Now a pair of hands wipes off the mud with wadded toilet tissue.

The hands, we notice, are bloody.

INT. BATHROOM - EARLY MORNING

Will is back in his hotel room, cleaning his shoes. When they're done, he looks into the mirror, to attend to his face. There are faint traces of dried gore around his mouth. Will has returned, enough, to human awareness, to know that he must rinse the blood from his hands and lips.

INT. ROOM - FIVE MINUTES LATER

Will slips, clean and naked, into bed with Laura, who barely stirs.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - MORNING

A MAN stands here, at Will's door, accompanied by a Bellhop. This is BRIDGER, whose unassuming air masks a pushiness that verges on the relentless. Right now he is absently studying the carpet in front of the door. Then, seeming to suddenly remember where he is, Bridger looks up and KNOCKS.

A beat, now Laura opens the door six inches -- still chained.

LAURA

Yes?

Bridger nods at the Bellhop who takes the hint, hurries off.

BRIDGER

Detective Sergeant Bridger, NYPD.

INT. ROOM - LATE MORNING

Laura gives Bridger a skeptical once-over.

LAURA

Any ID?

Bridger sighs. Reaches, strenuously, into his breast pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

Forget it, what's wrong --?

BRIDGER

Is William Randall, Jr. here?

Laura closes the door, then reopens it, unchained.

LAURA

He's just getting out of the shower.
What's the matter?

Bridger enters, glances around. First he notices the remains of a steak and egg breakfast, the eggs ignored, left next to a pile of stripped-clean bones. Next, he notices:

WILL, who steps out of the bathroom, towel around his waist. Though shaved and refreshed, the air of the predator still clings, disconcertingly, to him. Seeing Bridger, he grins ingratiatingly and moves to his pants, pulling out a wallet.

WILL

I'm Mr. Randall, I'm renting this room. You're the hotel manager and you had a few complaints last night, right? Well all I can say is: We may not be married, but we're deeply in love. Perhaps this will go part-way toward ameliorating the situation ..?

He's trying to tuck a fifty-dollar bill into Bridger's coat pocket. Meantime Laura has been trying to get his attention.

LAURA

Will, stop, he's not the hotel manager. He's a police detective.

Will steps back and gapes at Bridger, suddenly gripped by dread. The fifty flutters to the parquet floor.

BRIDGER

Your wife was found this morning. By your housekeeper. I'm sorry. She was beaten to death, sometime last night.

Will grasps wildly at the possibility of some mistake.

WILL

Charlotte?

CONTINUED:

BRIDGER

Neighbors heard sounds of a struggle. But no sign of forced entry. And the assailant got in and out via service stairs. He knew the building, we think he knew your wife.

The implication is clear. Will is silent.

LAURA

Mr. Randall was here with me all night. -- --

BRIDGER

Write me down your full name, address, occupation, phone. We'd like a sworn statement.

LAURA

Of course.

BRIDGER

You both ought to think about coming into headquarters, on your own steam, sometime today. We need blood and tissue samples, too. If you want to retain a lawyer first, Mr. Randall --

WILL

I want to see her. Charlotte. Where is she -- being -- kept --?

BRIDGER

Don't take this disrespectfully but she doesn't look good. She was raped, lacerated, bit up ... You see lots of things, some things worse than others.

Will turns to Laura who, with her eyes, urges him to reconsider. Will turns back to Bridger and quietly insists:

WILL

I want to see her.

LAURA

I'll go with you.

Will glances at her, grateful for the offer. But shakes his head, no.

CUT TO:

INT. MANHATTAN MORGUE - LATE MORNING

Will stands, hands folded, before a steel-topped table. The overhead fluorescents render his skin a sick green. A large impassive Morgue Attendant keeps watch from a far corner.

Charlotte is naked on the table, OUT OF FOCUS, our blurry sense of her battered body disconcerting but not horrid.

Will is standing still as a supplicant. He's having a hard time breathing, speaking. After a long, fraught silence:

WILL

It's just ... it's just ...

He hunches down, clutching his flanks, his body wracked with sobs. The Attendant is here now, huge shovel-hands upon Will's shoulders, steadyng him.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN MORGUE - LATE MORNING

Adjacent to NYU Medical, in the east 20's. Will emerges, shakily, into daylight. Now, across the street, he spots:

A handsome, elderly woman being helped out of a cab by two men. They seem to be supporting her, one holding each arm.

Will quickly starts toward her. But a hand ENTERS FRAME, gripping his bicep, restraining him. The hand belongs to:

BRIDGER

Mr. Randall, we need to talk.

WILL

In a minute, Bridger, in a minute --

He pulls, but Bridger grips him harder.

BRIDGER

You don't quite understand.

Will whirls. As though he were addressing a moron, or flake:

WILL

No, you don't understand. That's Charlotte's mother, alright? So if you'll take your goddamn hand off me, I have to go to her, be with her --

CONTINUED:

But Will is surrounded, suddenly, by three plainclothes cops. For a second, Will looks wild-eyed. Bridger explains, with professional detachment and only the merest hint of pity:

BRIDGER

The night man at the Stanhope saw you leave last night ... I myself noticed traces of mud, freshly tracked, in front of your door this morning ...

By now Charlotte's mother has disappeared into the building. Will seems pacific, suddenly resigned.

BRIDGER

I'm going to arrest you now, sir.

Bridger gently guides Will to an unmarked car parked in the ambulance zone. Will doesn't resist but he's lagging and, halfway to the car, he stops. Takes a breath. Throws Bridger a quizzical, almost longing look. And asks:

WILL

There's a ... river, near here?

BRIDGER

Yeah. Sure: the East River. Just a few blocks back thataway.

Will nods at Bridger. Bridger tenses: Is the suspect planning to bolt? But Will just has another, deeper, breath, taking in the lush, pungent smell of the river. Now he is ready. Composed, he walks to the cop car by himself.

CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING CELL - AFTERNOON

At Manhattan Correctional Center, Central Booking. The cell is inhabited by malcontents and creeps. And by Will, conspicuous in his white-collar duds yet distinctly more bestial than the ordinary brutes in here. It's his beard, grown in dark again, the thickening hair on the back of his neck, and his body language: Will is crouched in a corner, but not self-protectively ... He looks coiled, minutely monitoring his cellmates, ready to pounce if he must.

Two BADASSES share a bench on the far side of the cell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BADASS 1

(sotto)

How come that rude fucker keep sniffing us? He don't like our smell?

BADASS 2

Why don't we ask him nice, to keep his motherfucking nose to his self.

Badass 1 glances over at Will. Then, back to his buddy:

BADASS 1

... Maybe later.

A CORRECTIONAL OFFICER BANGS on the bars with his truncheon.

C.O.

Randall. Visitor.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Monitored by a C.O. in the next room, Will and Laura sit on opposite sides of a big wooden table. Will's guard is down with her, his animal vigilance supplanted by numb weariness.

LAURA

I'm sure you have your own lawyer but I think you should let Keyes represent you at the arraignment. He's --

WILL

(dull)

I know who he is. I don't want lawyers.

LAURA

You're being ridiculous. You didn't kill your wife.

WILL

The killer "knew the building," he knew Charlotte ...

LAURA

Of course he did, it was an inside job, some drugged-up doorman'll probably confess before we have to post bail.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL
I remember going out. I remember coming back, bloody --

LAURA
You got into a fight, on the street, in a bar. But you didn't kill her.

WILL
And why are you so goddamn sure? Because I'm a "good man"? If I ever ... was, and I'm not sure I ever was, I'm not any more ... Look at me.

He raises a hand, the one with the band-aid on the fingertip. Tears off the band-aid. The area surrounding the bite is now covered in hair so thick, it's nearly fur.

Confronted with this bizarre symptom, Laura can't easily hide her fear. Will implores -- his voice thick, almost a bark:

WILL
Look. It's really happening --

LAURA
Let's say it is. Let's just say.

She's regathered her strength. Will studies her, curious.

LAURA
It would be unthinkable for a wolf to harm its mate.

Then she reaches across the table and squeezes his hand.

LAURA
I have to go, talk to Keyes. Meantime I brought your books from the hotel. They're in your new cell, you're being transferred, you don't belong in there with those --

WILL
(faint smile)
Don't say "animals."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA
(smiles back)
Ruffians.

WILL
I'm not afraid of them.

LAURA
But they are, of you. Apparently a guy who stabbed his mother thirty-seven times told a guard you give him -- "the heebie-jeebies."

They share a tense laugh. Then impulsively Laura takes Will's furry fingertip and plants a kiss on it, jolting him.

LAURA
You are a good man. And maybe it sounds stupid and banal, but a good man like you would become a good wolf.

Then quickly she stands, to leave. Hurries out. She can't bear to watch, as the C.O. comes to take Will away again.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CELL - LATER

Will, in his private cell, crouches in the corner with the pile of books Laura brought. He slowly sifts through them, surveying the jackets, almost reluctant to look inside ... Now he opens a book at random, a thick one -- Updike's Rabbit Is Rich -- and studies a page, brow slowly furrowing.

INSERT - BOOK PAGE

The text, to Will, looks like this:

```

Grohgrry      tu fghe bacjgowrd.      Ghe tob du
braybreey    tghroed the ja.  Fo there jare not
ehy guyre    hebitions gf jog ggame, wg tyris utep
riolooilhos.

```

BACK TO WILL

He squeezes his eyes closed, then opens them and surveys the page again. Things have not improved. Will is motionless, for a beat. Then suddenly begins tearing the pages -- shredding them all, turning fiction into confetti ... and then starts to frantically chew, on the cardboard covers ...

TIME CUT:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Will is curled in a dark corner, on his blanket which has been enhanced with several pounds of soft shredded paper. His jaw is black with stubble; his limbs are folded under him in the manner of a dog; he lightly snores.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. VISITING ROOM - LATER

Laura and Will sit opposite each other, separated by one of those awful scratched and yellowed plexiglass partitions; they communicate over telephones. Will, looking severely debilitated, rests his head against the plastic, which grotesquely flattens and stretches one side of his face.

Laura is trying to rally him.

LAURA

... Forensics apparently screwed up the sperm samples, they're tainted, unusable ... It's one less piece of crucial evidence, Will, who knows, they might wind up dismissing the case.

Will doesn't react to this information.

LAURA

Keyes is discussing release conditions with the judge right now. I'm gonna try to have you out within two days.

Again, nothing. Finally after a long silence, Will whispers:

WILL

It's hot.

His voice is constricted, flushed cheeks glazed with sweat. As though he's slowly suffocating.

LAURA

Okay ... listen ... imagine: You're already out. Free ... it's cold, vast. Will, are you listening ...?

Will remains slumped, staring at nothing. Nonetheless Laura continues, her steady, modulated voice masking her fear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

There's a place up in Newfoundland, called Labrador, my father has a cabin there, he took me once when I was young: Fjords up and down the coast, heavy forests inland ... shimmering lakes and rushing rivers and wolves, packs of them, roaming ...

It now seems to her that Will's breathing has steadied.

LAURA

It's a place where wolves haven't been declared "savage" and destroyed ... an unspoiled place, a wild place, and you're there, now, just picture it, you're part of the landscape, you belong, you've been there forever ...

Will slowly draws his head away from the partition, raising it just so slightly, his eyes meeting Laura's.

LAURA

When you're hungry you reach into the river, find a fish ... When you're sleepy you dig a shallow bed in the dirt, line it with leaves, curl up and rest ...

Will speaks. Guttural, but no longer gasping for breath.

WILL

... And where ... are you ...?

LAURA

With you.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CELL - LATER

Will weakly paces the cell. Occasionally he rubs his gut, then falls to all fours, listlessly circling the stone floor, sniffing ... he settles on a spot on which to lie ... Then, too hungry to rest, he struggles to rise again, goes to the bars, sniffs again ...

Indeed a C.O. soon comes down the hall with a tray in one hand. With the other, he drags his truncheon along the bars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

C.O.

Chow.

The C.O. crouches down and slides a cardboard bowl through a slot made in the bars, for this purpose.

Will takes a look into the bowl. Sees a greyish, lumpy, oatmeal-like gruel. He manages to fling it across the cell, where it splatters on a wall. Then Will begins to weep:

WILL

You're fucking kidding ... What is this puke? I need meat ... meat ...

The C.O. folds his fat arms, and chortles:

C.O.

Oh I see, you want Porterhouse maybe?
Or would you like a London Broil, sir?

Still chortling, he walks away.

Famished and frustrated, Will crawls over to the wall ... then, despising himself, he crawls across the cell and begins licking the dripping gruel off the filthy stone wall.

DISSOLVE:

Several hours later. Will is deeply asleep again, curled canine-style on his paper-padded blanket. He looks pasty and drawn, his breathing irregular and shallow, whistling. As it would a wolf, captivity is killing him.

CUT TO:

EXT. 100 CENTRE STREET - EVENING

End of the day: Assistant DA's, court-appointed attorneys, relatives of the accused stream out of the criminal courts building, downtown. OVER this ESTABLISHING SHOT, we HEAR:

KEYES'S VOICE

The man is suspected in one murder and two assaults with deadly intent ...

LAURA'S VOICE

The murder charge is bullshit.

INT. CORRIDOR - EVENING

Laura and her father's general counsel hurry down the hall.

KEYES

And the cops?

LAURA

He hasn't been charged with that.

KEYES

That's not the point.

LAURA

Here's the point: You met him, right? Offered him his job back. He didn't seem crazy or dangerous to you then --

KEYES

If he's not insane, then there's brain involvement. Do you prefer that?

Keyes reaches into his inside jacket pocket and pulls out a small legal pad, the top page covered in scribbled notes.

KEYES

"Encephalopathy." Could be anything, really, from a tumor to a fungus, deranging his mind.

LAURA

Or another explanation, that we don't understand yet, all the viruses and bacteria loose in the world, exploding population, ecosystems ravaged, wild animals displaced by war ...

KEYES

Look, I understand, with a father who wins every battle, why you've staked out the lost causes. Your films, your boyfriends and husbands, they've cost a lot of heartache and cash ... Could there be another explanation? Maybe. Can I stop you from bailing out Will Randall? No. I can only beg you to please not put your health at risk, and your wealth, and your happiness too ... For what, Laura, my dear?

CONTINUED:

They've reached a heavy mahogany door. Keyes tries to help, but Laura's ahead of him: she pushes it wide open.

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - EVENING

The JUDGE is just putting on his overcoat, calling it a day. Laura, with Keyes trailing a step, comes right up to him and declares:

LAURA

I'm posting bail for Mr. Randall. Mr. Keyes, as my fiduciary, is authorized to write a check for the million dollars, from my trust.

The dismayed Judge glances at Keyes, who nods: That's what we've decided. Now the Judge turns to Laura. Sternly:

JUDGE

From the cautions and precautions I've seen on his police report, Randall needs to be observed. By top pathologists at a hospital or clinic --

LAURA

We've already booked a private room for Mr. Randall, your Honor, at the Trachtenberg Institute.

The Judge nods, thoughtfully. Throws another glance at Keyes. Who improvises, with great gravity:

KEYES

It's the best facility in the country for this sort of thing.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - LATE NIGHT

Back at Manhattan Correctional Center: Will is being released. Surrounded by Keyes, Laura, and a C.O., he sits in a rusty wheelchair, grizzled, dirty, wild-eyed, looking like an escapee from a Soviet psychiatric ward. Now he cranes his head and rasps, to Alden's lawyer:

WILL

Keyes ... Your offer, it still stands?

CONTINUED:

KEYES

Of course, Mr. Randall.

WILL

Un-huh. And what were the terms again?

KEYES

(a beat, then)

I believe it was Stewart Swinton's base salary plus twenty percent, plus a five-percent increase in profits.

Will nods: now I remember.

WILL

I'm still not interested, Keyes.

KEYES

Of course that's your right, Mr. Randall.

The elevator opens and Will, still cackling, is wheeled out.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN CORRECTIONAL CENTER - LATE NIGHT

REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS flock in front of the building, waiting for Will to emerge. We catch FRAGMENTS of conversation:

REPORTERS

Publisher-wife-killer ... What's the deal --? I keep hearing ... weird ... "Buster the Dog Boy" ... What the C.O.'s call him ... Hey maybe his mom fucked a Husky ...

Now Keyes, escorted by several C.O.'s, steps out. Simultaneously a limousine pulls up. We HEAR a BUZZ among the press, e.g., "That's his lawyer" and "He's coming."

INT. RANGE ROVER (MOVING) - SAME TIME

Laura, at the wheel, pulls out of a side entrance. Rounds the front of the MCC, eyes the crowd and laughs, incredulous.

LAURA

Jesus Christ. Keep your head down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Will is scrunched in the back seat. He can hear the commotion.

WILL

What is it, a lynch mob?

LAURA

Worse, the media.

Will laughs. Laura is revved.

LAURA

Shoulda seen me with the judge, I was great, I made up an institute ... Keyes played along, he was a prince ...

Will stretches out, tries to get comfortable. Presently:

WILL

Thank you.

LAURA

Fuck it, it wasn't a favor! It's your right, to be free on bail.

WILL

(pleased, muses)

Free ... No more cold concrete floor for awhile, meat-less meals ... living symbol of wildness held captive ...

LAURA

Now we're getting a bit grandiose ..?

WILL

You think?

Laura shoots onto the West Side Highway, heading north. The faint first light of day illuminates the Hudson.

Will inhales deeply, and sighs.

WILL

I smell New Jersey.

LAURA

(smiles)

Yes, is it awful?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

No. It's getting easier, everything ... The old world wore me out and this is a new one ... When they threw me in jail I was scared, then I gave in to it, had a dream, dreamt that I died ... I went up to heaven, heaven was an ice floe. And ... don't laugh, Laura ... God ... God was a wolf.

Laura wipes a tear from her eye, and keeps driving. With a quick glance in the rearview, at the fading city, behind her.

Will is leaving Manhattan, leaving "civilization" -- quite likely, she knows in her heart, for the last time.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - EARLY MORNING

The Range Rover bounces up a windy, narrow dirt trail. OVER:

LAURA'S VOICE

Case there's some intrepid reporter at the main gate ... we'll take the back road in.

INT. RANGE ROVER (MOVING) - EARLY MORNING

Will sits up in the back seat now, looking preternaturally alert. Birds, squirrels, foxes, deer ... he senses their presence, their movement, everywhere. He sniffs, eyes dart.

WILL

Laura ... Let me out here.

LAURA

No. I want you to rest in my cottage. I want to feed you properly. Bathe you. Brush your teeth, most of all. Then I want to fly up to Vermont, when you're strong enough, go back to the place where you hit the wolf, look for someone who knows something about all this, about what's happening ...

WILL

You mean you believe me, now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laura pauses, surprised to realize ...

LAURA

... I guess I do.

WILL

Good. But I want to stay here.

LAURA

What? Will ... If we can track somebody down, someone who knows something ... Then maybe we can find a way to treat it, even reverse it --

WILL

"Isn't it pretty to think so?" But it's too late for that and you know it.

(a breath)

I really believe, that the best thing for me, is not to fight it ... Or anything ... I think that slows it way down, when I just ... give in, to it.

Laura stops the Range Rover. And Will climbs out, scurrying through the open window. Laura gets out too, using the door.

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

Laura grabs Will's hand, and he turns.

LAURA

Will ...

Without a word he embraces her and they fall onto the forest floor, rolling in the leaves, the moss, kissing and holding each other. Finally they disentangle and lie still on their backs, silently staring up at the patch of morning sky that can be seen through the trees ... happy for the stolen moment, and wondering what is to come, for them both.

Now Laura turns to Will ... to find that he's gone. Startled, she sits up, in time to see him dart into the trees. Amazed at how swiftly he's blended into the foliage. And sorry to see him go, without her.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S COTTAGE - EARLY EVENING

Shadows are falling. Laura sits motionless at her desk, brooding, staring at the mountains of unedited film reels.

Suddenly, in an access of frustration, she sweeps a pile of film off the desktop, into the garbage. Then another pile. She's about to dispose of more burdensome film, when her phone RINGS. Apprehensive, she freezes. After her MESSAGE:

BRIDGER'S VOICE
Ms. Alden, Detective Bridger here ...

Laura reaches over to take the call, when she HEARS:

BRIDGER'S VOICE
Seems the serologists had the same problem with Randall's blood sample as our guys did, with the sperm traces we recovered from his wife.

Laura doesn't want to hear the rest of this.

BRIDGER'S VOICE
Seems they both somehow got mixed with animal DNA, canine maybe. You being Randall's resourceful pal, I thought you might know how this stunt was pulled. So call or come down here or I will show up there, if I have to.

Just as he CLICKS OFF there is another shock: a KNOCK! It's Will, his face in shadow, in the window.

Laura crosses to the door, to let him in. He enters, moving to a dark corner, where he crouches. And smiles at her.

WILL
I'm back. Back to. The new normal.

He looks wild; beautiful and dangerous. And he instantly senses:

WILL
What ..?

Laura starts to speak, to shrug -- it's nothing -- but:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

What?

LAURA

Both samples, your blood and ... what they found at -- with your wife ...

Will sharply inhales.

WILL

The same?

Laura takes a step back.

LAURA

I still maintain it's impossible that you ... did that to your wife. You --

Will springs at her, grabs her, fairly barks:

WILL

Stop. Stop it! It's staring right at you. I have to be put down.

LAURA

"Put down"?! You're not a beast --

WILL

Please --

Will begins to sob in terrible dry gasps.

LAURA

I can't do that.

WILL

Then lock me up. In a cage --

LAURA

You're crazy, we just got you free for chrissakes --

Will glances, wildly, out the window: The moon is beginning to glow, in a pale purple sky. He turns back to her.

WILL

It's almost night.

There's panic in his eyes. Laura thinks, quickly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

There is an empty single stall, it's
fairly clean, enclosed, out of the way
... But --

WILL

Please.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She restlessly tosses. Now a WAIL echoes, eerily, in the night ... no, it's a HOWL -- what the hell? Laura gets up, grabs her robe, quickly finds her slippers ...

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Lit by a gibbous moon, Laura hurries into the clinic half of the barn ...

EXT. STALL - NIGHT

Out of breath, Laura reaches the single stall, on the outskirts of the property, kept warm by the sort of "heat tree" one finds on restaurant patios.

She gasps with surprise: Will's face is pressed against the bars. He wears a strained smile. His tone is exaggeratedly melodic, as though to conjure great heights of sanity and self-control. It takes much concentration for Will to articulate his words.

WILL

Hello, darling. How are you?

LAURA

Was that you before? I heard a loud --

WILL

This is silly, darling, don't you agree? Locking a man in a cage, like an animal? Especially a man of my background, one with cultivated tastes.

He gives Laura an absurd shrug. She's uncertain, but keeps her distance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

You insisted, Will. And you made me promise to leave you till morning, no matter what.

WILL

(lightly scoffs)

Darling, don't be so literal ... Please, I won't bother you, I have work to do, I'm way behind in my work.

LAURA

(testing)

Really ...? What do you do, Will?

WILL

I ... Why, I ... You know what I do, dear, I'm an important man, what the fuck is the problem here, just let me out of this stinking barn before I blow a fucking fuse.

(takes a breath)

Darling.

Laura holds a little white pill between her fingers.

LAURA

I want you to take this. A thing called Ritalin. It's a tranquilizer, used on horses and humans.

Will smiles, suavely. He's Cary Grant with canine incisors.

WILL

But I'm neither, dear.

LAURA

Please, it'll calm you ...

WILL

Maybe I don't want to be calm with you?

Nonetheless Will complies, slipping an arm through the bars as far as it can go, which is just past the wrist. Laura puts the pill in his palm, and --

-- Will grabs her hand, then yanks her forward, forcing her up against the bars, roughly feeling under her nightgown.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

With her free hand, Laura swats his face, using the edge of her palm, with everything she's got. Will lets go with a GROWL and she runs for it.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

She lies here with a pillow over her head, her sobs almost drowning out the HOWLS echoing in the night ...

CUT TO:

EXT. STALL - MORNING

All is quiet now as Laura peers through the bars: Will is curled in the corner on a straw bed. Seeing her, there is recognition, but it takes a long moment and much mental energy (as after a devastating drug-and-booze binge) for Will to reassemble the human particulars of mind and memory.

WILL

... Laura ...?

She has unlocked the door, opened it. But she doesn't venture inside. Will, reading her drawn visage and wary posture, sits up with apprehensive dread. As he gently rubs his swollen jaw, where she'd walloped him:

WILL

What did I -- last night -- did I do?

Laura tries to make light.

LAURA

No permanent damage ... If we worked together, maybe, I'd have a decent sex harassment suit. But --

A strangled YELP of misery issues from Will's throat. His face crumples, shoulders sag. Laura goes to him, squatting in the straw, stroking his sadly bruised and stubbly cheek.

WILL

I need to be put down. Why haven't you done that yet? I killed my wife, I'll hurt you Laura, badly badly, I need to be put down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

I told you, I can't do that.

She lifts Will's face up to hers. His features are changing still, slowly and subtly, but remarkably. She's scared -- for him, and for herself -- but she is not repelled. For that, Will is grateful. But the fact remains:

WILL

I can't live.

LAURA

You know I could never.

WILL

You don't have to.

They share a long look. Something is passing between them, silently ... an understanding, a pact of some kind. Finally:

LAURA

I have to drive into the city now. To see that detective, or he'll come out here ... I'll be gone most of the day.

WILL

Okay.

We're not sure what's beneath all this, but they seem to be.

LAURA

I'll ... be back, this evening.

WILL

Alright.

They stare at each other for another prolonged beat. Then she kisses him. When she breaks the kiss, he utters another muffled CRY of pain. Laura abruptly stands, and hurries out.

CUT TO:

EXT. WEST SIDE HIGHWAY - NOON

We PICK OUT the Range Rover in light traffic, heading south.

INT. RANGE ROVER (MOVING) - NOON

From this distance, in this light, the skyline looks oddly enchanted, an Emerald City. But Laura doesn't notice --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

she's numb, past tears, a blank. She's turned on the RADIO, some trite CHAT to mute the raucous voices in her mind ...

CUT TO:

EXT. ONE POLICE PLAZA - AFTERNOON

Laura drifts across the plaza, then inside Manhattan police headquarters.

INT. HOMICIDE DEPARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Crowded with irritable people who've been waiting awhile, on uncomfortable chairs. Laura tells the RECEPTIONIST:

LAURA

Laura Alden, for Detective Bridger.

RECEPTIONIST

He expecting you?

LAURA

Yes, I'm a few minutes early.

RECEPTIONIST

He's running behind. Sit down.

Laura looks around: there are no empty chairs, of course. But now, from behind her, she HEARS:

MAN'S VOICE

Here, Miss ... take my seat.

LAURA

No, that's okay --

She turns. It's:

STEWART

I've been sitting awhile, and you look a little ... what, under the weather?

Stewart is slick as ever, yet something's different. His beard is darker, eyes narrower yet more piercing than before.

LAURA

No, I'm just -- I'm fine ...

Stewart stares.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART

You look very familiar. Do we know each other? I'm Stewart Swinton, I --

LAURA

No, I don't think so.

Unable to place her, Stewart lets it drop.

STEWART

Anyway it's a strain, having to come to a hellish place like this. Lady like you, surrounded by ... subhumans.

He smiles, showing teeth that are prominent and sharp.

STEWART

Terrible, this mindless violence that seems to touch everyone's lives lately.

Laura shrugs, nods: terrible, yes. She tries to subtly edge away but Stewart stays close to her.

STEWART

I'm in shock myself, still, over the murder of a friend. Nice woman, wife of a colleague. No, really more than a colleague ... He was my mentor.

Laura nods, slowly. Despite the cacophony in her mind, Stewart's last phrase resounds.

LAURA

And you were his ... "protege."

STEWART

You're very intuitive.

He strokes his chin with his thumb, trying to look thoughtful. And Laura notices the little patch of fur on it.

She takes another step away.

LAURA

Excuse me, it was nice meeting you but I have to -- I just remembered --

She's walking backward, slowly, out of here. And Stewart is moving, gliding, along with her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART

You seem as lonely as you are lovely,
 hope that doesn't sound too bold, or
 impertinent ... But would you have a
 drink with me, after you're done here?
 I'd be thrilled to get an earful of
 your troubles.

Laura's shaking her head, woodenly smiling, still walking
 backward toward the door.

LAURA

Thank you, that's very sweet, but --

Now Bridger sticks his head out of his office. He looks
 sweaty, harassed, in no mood. He SHOUTS:

BRIDGER

"Stewart Swinton" --!

Stewart sighs, turns to the detective. And Laura slips out.

INT. CORRIDOR - LAURA

Hurriedly searching for a phone while feeling in her purse
 for change. She spots a booth -- then glances back at the
 Homicide door. It's too close, she feels spooked ... she
 strides over to the elevator, presses Down. Quietly chants:

LAURA

C'mon-c'mon-c'mon.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BRIDGER'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Stewart's legs are crossed, the one on top impatiently
 jiggling as Bridger opens his notepad to an empty page.

BRIDGER

When was the last time you saw or
 spoke to Randall. Do you recall?

But Stewart is distracted. A beat, then:

STEWART

That woman out there ... Is she here
 to see you about Charlotte's murder
 too?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIDGER

What woman?

STEWART

That very pretty woman out there. The
only pretty woman out there.

(then, realizes)

It's Alden's daughter, right? Come
on, Bridger, what's her name, does she
live up there, on his estate? You
must know.

BRIDGER

Don't take this disrespectfully, sir,
but do I look like a fucking pimp?

Stewart forces a laugh -- no, sorry, absolutely not.

CUT TO:

INT. ONE POLICE PLAZA LOBBY - AFTERNOON (A MINUTE LATER)

Laura has found a phone down here. She's dialed a number,
two RINGS, then:

MAN'S VOICE

This is Clyde.

LAURA

Clyde, thank god, it's Laura! Listen
... There's a man, a friend, his name
is Will, he's a guest of mine up
there, you may have seen him roaming
around with me ... Anyway he might be
anywhere on the grounds, I'm in
Manhattan, I'm heading back now ...
What I want is for you and everyone
you can round up, to find Will. And
tell him ... even if he's acting
strange he'll know what this means,
just say I'm on my way and tell him,
"It wasn't you. It was Stewart."

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BRIDGER'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Bridger is onto his next question.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIDGER

Or can you recall Randall ever discussing feelings of rage, toward --

Suddenly Stewart -- who'd appeared to be paying reasonable attention -- jerks his head to the side, and down, staring hard as though he's trying to see through the floor.

And Bridger notes, with surprise, that Stewart's ears have rammed forward. And the hair on the back of Stewart's neck ... Bridger hadn't noticed before, but it's quite thick, almost matted ... the hair actually rises.

BRIDGER

Mr. Swinton ... Are you alright?

Stewart looks back at Bridger. Blinks, then starts to stand.

STEWART

Is that it?

BRIDGER

It's "it," when I'm finished. Sit.

CUT TO:

INT. RANGE ROVER (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

Traffic is bad, but Laura's reflexes are goosed by adrenalin -- she darts from lane to lane while ardently whispering:

LAURA

Please god ... let them find Will.

CUT TO:

INT. BRIDGER'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON (LATER)

Bridger is finally done with Stewart, who moves to the door.

BRIDGER

And you'll contact us if you should hear from him? Or remember anything --

STEWART

Count on it, Detective ...

His hand is wrapped around the doorknob. Oddly, Bridger notes, there is a thick patch of hair, a bit like fur, growing out of the thumb.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Bridger looks up from the thumb to Stewart's face for one more question:

BRIDGER

Mr. Swinton, did you know Charlotte?

STEWART

The, um, wife of my mentor? You bet I did ... She was like a mother to me.

He smiles bittersweetly, striving to exude sentiment. From Bridger's angle, Stewart's teeth look funnily like fangs.

Bridger nods, and jots a note in his pad.

CUT TO:

EXT. WEST SIDE HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON (LATER)

A black Beemer streaks north, death on wheels.

INT. BMW (MOVING) - LATE AFTERNOON

Stewart drives with one hand, head thrown back, the picture of confidence and predatory ease. He's feeling unreasonably good about himself, like a man who's just been shooting megadoses of steroids. And he's jauntily whistling, on his way up the Hudson. We recognize the tune:

"Who's Afraid Of the Big Bad Wolf?"

CUT TO:

EXT. ALDEN ESTATE - LATE AFTERNOON

George the Gatekeeper waves Laura through, happy to see her.

EXT. STAFF QUARTERS - LATE AFTERNOON

Laura pulls up. There's a handsome young fellow out on the porch, sipping a beer -- CLYDE, Alden's Sam Shepard-like helicopter pilot. We read at a glance his infatuation with Laura, and her friendly but total lack of interest.

LAURA

You find him?

CLYDE

We looked everywhere. I even checked inside the chopper ... Who is this guy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laura gestures: thanks anyway. Drives off, leaving dust.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - EARLY EVENING

Laura has taken up her own search, driving around the back trails for an hour. Now she stops the Range Rover, gets out and silently approaches a remote clearing. She sees:

A LARGE PIT

Freshly dug, big enough for a human being. At the rim of the pit lies a large hypodermic, for putting down animals.

BACK TO SCENE

Laura walks, with dread, toward the pit. But it's empty. Stooping, she sees that the hypodermic is still filled with barbiturate, it hasn't been used.

Now, behind her, she hears a RUSTLING. Laura whirls, sees Will standing here, his clothes matted with leaves, hands caked with dirt. Though it is even harder for him to speak, today, he sounds almost serene. Glancing at the hypo:

WILL

I got that at the clinic. Then I came out to this spot.

LAURA

Where I buried all my pets.

WILL

It seemed right. So I started to dig. I was digging, all day. Then people came looking ... I hid.

Nearly overcome to find Will alive, Laura moves to him.

LAURA

Will ... Do you know who I am?

WILL

(smiles)

Laura.

Laura smiles too, eyes misting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILL

While I hid ... I watched a squirrel
eat an acorn. And he looked so ...
(struggles for the word)
... determined.

Laura reaches out a hand, to stroke his shoulder.

LAURA

You didn't kill your wife. It was
Stewart. Your "protege" ... Remember? ...
I saw him today, in the city, he's
changing too, somehow ...

Will laughs! A burst of joyous incredulity as he remembers:

WILL

That night ... I bit him.

Laura laughs too, then embraces Will. He holds her tightly.
They cling to each other for a long time.

LAURA

Now you don't have to ... do, what you
were going to.

But when she loosens her grip on Will, to step back and look
at him, she sees that he is pensive, even sad.

LAURA

... What ..?

WILL

Stewart. Killed her. Charlotte ...

A terrible weight to the words.

WILL

I ... don't want to. Go back, to
people. Even. If I could.

Laura nods. She understands, perfectly.

WILL

Forward.

LAURA

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laura picks up the unused hypodermic. Then takes Will's hand, leading him over to the Range Rover.

LAURA

I'm going to talk to my father. Tell him who's responsible for the murder, have him mobilize his lawyers, his contacts, his cronies ... But first let's get you back to my cottage --

WILL

No. No ... The stall.

LAURA

What? You mean, you want --? But --

WILL

(adamant)

Please. At night: I feel safe there.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN GATE - EVENING

The black Beemer pulls up, stops. George leans down.

GEORGE

Help you, my friend?

Stewart rolls open the tinted window. A twinkle in his yellow-tinged eye.

STEWART

Little pig, little pig, let me come in.

George adjusts his hearing aid; he can't have heard right.

GEORGE

Coming to see who?

STEWART

The billionaire's beautiful daughter.

GEORGE

On business?

STEWART

On pleasure, you twit. Does she look like the fuck of the decade, or are your eyes failing, too?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

George blanches. Gruffly:

GEORGE

I'm going to ask you to back up, Sir.

STEWART

Oh, alright.

Stewart backs up his BMW.

Then floors the pedal, in Drive, running down poor George, then crashing through the gate.

EXT. GROUNDS - NIGHT (LATER)

Joe, the roving guard, stops in his tracks, surprised to see a well-dressed man with a weird hint of muzzle emerge from the bushes. Approaching, with a hand on his holster:

JOE

Excuse me, Sir --

Stewart thrusts out his jaw and tears out Joe's thorax, instantly killing him.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Laura emerges, presumably having just spoken to Alden. Now she starts down the path to her cottage. Above, the moon emerges from behind a bank of heavy clouds.

The moon is full.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S COTTAGE - LATE NIGHT

She enters. Just before she flicks on the light switch --

-- a powerful hand is clamped on her mouth. Now we see the glistening, bristly face of STEWART looming behind her.

STEWART

Please don't turn me down. The last lady who did, was so sorry.

Laura blinks furiously, and tries to speak. Stewart can tell, by her breathing, that she's managed to calm herself. He carefully brings his palm away from her lips. She pants:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

This ... is a surprise. How did you
... you find me ...?

Stewart's enlarged teeth are slick and dripping with saliva.

STEWART

Followed my nose to the bitch in heat.
The rich bitch.

Now he notices the reels of film, scattered.

STEWART

Hey, what is all this, porno?

LAURA

My private stock, if you must know.
Take a peek ...?

Stewart grabs some loose film, holds it up, squints. With his enhanced vision, he can easily discern the tiny images.

STEWART

Outrageous. Kiddie snuff ...

LAURA

That's just to break the ice, Stewart
... Like to see my toys?

Stewart's "yes" emerges as a husky HOWL. As Laura glides past him, over to her dresser, he proposes:

STEWART

I'm hankering to hump you to death,
darling, how would that be?

LAURA

Dreamy.

She's grabbed the large hypodermic; she whirls. Stewart tries to block her but she stabs the heavy-gauge needle into his face. Stewart sinks to his knees, screaming curses as he tugs on the sunken needle ... Meantime she snatches up the key to Will's stall and races out of the cottage.

EXT. GROUNDS - LATE NIGHT

Laura runs toward the stable, but it's "out of the way," it's goddam far ... an anguished HOWL is coming from there --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

-- Will --!

Now we see, a hundred yards back, Stewart coming after her.

He gains on Laura with awesome speed, scrambling down the path with a snarl. As she reaches Will's stall, Stewart does a phenomenal leap through the air, almost flying, and lands on top of her, bringing her down. The key to Will's padlock drops from her hand not two feet from his stall.

Will thrusts his arm through the bars. But it's too thick just above the wrist, he strains yet simply can't reach any farther ... Will wildly HOWLS as he vainly SLAMS himself against the stall door. And we note something awesome:

Each impact, all that frenzy, has sped the transformation: Will looks as much like a wolf, now, as he does a man.

Meantime Stewart slashes at Laura's jeans, then begins to mount the wildly struggling young woman from behind, excitedly grunting and yipping ...

Will realizes that his arm is now thinner, almost a foreleg ... While he still has a hand, he thrusts his arm/foreleg through the bars again -- and this time he just reaches the key ...

Laura bucks but can't quite dislodge Stewart as he tears away her panties ... she screams as he tugs open his trousers, about to enter her --

-- when Will oops the lock, yanks open the door and flies out of the stall, jaw snapping.

Instantly the man-wolves are upon each other, snarling, wrestling and ripping, a bloody blur ... They crash into the heat-tree, toppling it against Will's stall ...

Laura can't do a thing -- the action is fantastically sped-up, Will and Stewart entwined in a ball of sweat, fur and fury. Now, panicked and helpless, she notices:

The fallen heat-tree has set fire to the straw that lines the stall, and the flames are rising, spreading ...!

When, abruptly the foes freeze, Will on all fours. Stewart, standing, takes a step back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laura goes to Will, who appears to be the mortally wounded one. All that's wrong with Stewart, apparently, is a torn shirt.

Now Stewart looks down and parts the shirt, along the tear. And sees that his whole abdomen has been ripped open, by Will's teeth ... Now his guts spill out, onto the ground ...

Laura screams. Woozy, Stewart staggers forward, a step, accidentally stomping on his own intestines. Horrified, he backs up ... arms crossed in front, trying to hold himself intact ... and stumbles backward, into the inferno of the stall, collapsing in the flames. Then the stall collapses.

Will slowly stands, seen in LOW ANGLE: The full moon silhouettes his elongated face as he watches his enemy consumed. As Laura shuts her eyes and prays, Will throws back his head and looses a stunning HOWL, that's far beyond both triumph and despair.

CUT TO:

INT. CLINIC - LATE NIGHT

Laura works by one dim light -- we can make out very little. She tenderly, methodically cleans and bandages Will's injured body as he lies here, more than half changed, grotesque, yet possessing the grace and power of an animal.

LAURA

How bad does it hurt ..?

Will groans a bit, but manages to assure:

WILL

I'm. Alright.

LAURA

You will be, soon ... I will be, too.

She lightly strokes his mouth, that's becoming a muzzle. Then, suddenly, slips a hand inside and forces shut his jaw, driving his teeth into her flesh, drawing blood. Laura winces just slightly from the pain as she pulls out her hand.

Will stares at her, startled. And she explains:

LAURA

It's a way out. With someone I love.
A once in a lifetime chance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She finds Will's slitted eyes burning into hers. He manages:

WILL
I'm not. Scared now ... to forget.
Everything.

Through the clinic window, Laura sees the far-off Firemen, supervised by Alden in a silk bathrobe, dousing the flames. She turns back to Will. As she helps him off the table:

LAURA
Neither am I. If we try. Somehow,
somehow. To never forget each other.

Then she guides him, in shadow, to the door. And the lovers slip out together, into darkness.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROUNDS - LATE NIGHT

Three unmarked cars pull up. Bridger hops out of the lead car. Eight uniformed Cops step from the other cars, uneasily standing by. Bridger warily approaches Alden, inspecting the charred, smoking remains of the stall. Holding out credentials:

BRIDGER
Mr. Alden ... I'm Detective Sergeant
Bridger, NYPD Homicide.

Alden turns to him and frowns, at the intrusion.

BRIDGER
Sorry to bother you, to show up in these numbers, I see you've had a problem here ... I have a problem too. Your daughter, Laura ..? We think she's harboring a suspected felon on these grounds. You may know him, his name's William Randall, we believe --

ALDEN
(testy)
Of course I know him, why?

BRIDGER
Randall probably killed his wife, sir. And you've got two dead guards, he may be responsible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALDEN
(stunned)
George? And Joe ..? My god --

Alden's features tighten, his tone turns granite hard.

ALDEN
Let's find him, then, dammit.

BRIDGER
He may have set this fire to cover his --
getaway, possibly with your daughter.
You have my word, she won't be hurt.
I'll need your permission to let my
officers fan out around your grounds --

Alden shakes his head: that won't be necessary.

ALDEN
I know how they planned to escape.
I'll get my shotgun, I'll lead the way.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUEST COTTAGE - LATE NIGHT (FIVE MINUTES LATER)

Alden leads the small army of cops, rifle cradled in his arms. Bridger can barely keep up with the ailing but resolute tycoon. Now Alden stops, gesticulates:

ALDEN
That's Randall's car ... They must've
holed up here, then taken off on foot.

Several Cops surround Will's Volvo, left by the cottage last week. The others swarm inside the cottage, searching for evidence. Bridger stays close to Alden, awaiting guidance.

ALDEN
There's a trail behind the cottage, a
back way through the woods. It's
several miles to the main road.

He starts off. Bridger whistles for his men, who quickly regroup, flashlights fired up. And then we HEAR a THWACK-THWACKING, that quickly intensifies. The cops stop, turn, look up ... as the source of the SOUND is revealed:

A HELICOPTER

rises, from the very opposite corner of the Alden estate.

BACK TO SCENE

Some cops scratch their heads: that's funny. Others shout: "Stop them!" Some start to run, vainly, toward the spot.

Bridger turns to Alden, who's watching his helicopter's ascent with the faintest smile.

BRIDGER

Don't take this disrespectfully, sir,
but you couldn't have led us farther
from Randall's point of escape.

Alden turns to Bridger, gently places a hand on his shoulder.

ALDEN

I hail from a small town near Lake Winnipesaukee, a lovely spot in New Hampshire, the "Granite State." Home state of Horace Greeley and Daniel Webster, if those names mean something to you. Anyway, we have a motto in New Hampshire: "Live Free Or Die."

BRIDGER

(thin smile)

I see. My superior officers, on the other hand, may not.

ALDEN

Detective ... Have you considered that your man might not be Will Randall at all, but another fellow, a piece of shit called Stewart Swinton?

BRIDGER

As a matter of fact, yes, I have.

ALDEN

Well, good. You're a good cop, Bridger, we can do business together.

Alden extends his arm, across Bridger's shoulders. As he leads the detective back up to the Main House, we FADE OUT.

FADE IN ON:

INT. RIZZOLI'S BOOKS - NIGHT

The swank shop is closed for a publication party. SUPER UP:

ONE YEAR LATER

The room is jammed with literati: Nick and Nora, Mailer and MacInerney, John Patrick Shanley and Bret Easton Ellis ... Celebrants greedily grab at strips of barbecued chicken, and gather around a punch bowl that's like a watering hole.

The book, stacked in ziggurats around the room, is Mozart In Paris. As we PAN the party, we spot Renata Adler chatting up Maude Wiggins and overhear comments, e.g., "Kundera is every bit as brilliant, but I can't actually read him."

Now we FIND ROY, who in a year has grown into his role as editor-in-chief: There's a gravitas about him, and whatever inroads HIV has made are manifest only in an elegant walking stick he must use. Right now Roy is surrounded by glamorous pals, but he's distracted, and he tactfully excuses himself.

EXT. RIZZOLI'S - NIGHT

Roy slips out into the relative quiet of Fifth Avenue. Mary is out here too. Both stand silent for a moment, mulling.

ROY

Thinking about him?

MARY

The bastard was exonerated, why hasn't he come back ...?

ROY

To Will, you SOB, wherever you are, we miss you --

He chokes up, then lifts his plastic champagne glass, in a toast. So does Mary. And now a drop of rain strikes Roy. Then another. Quickly, a storm has come. Roy gestures: Let's go back inside. As he holds open the door for Mary, we gradually FADE UP the now-familiar THWACK-THWACKING, and

CUT TO:

INT. HELICOPTER (FLYING) - AFTERNOON

Clyde pilots, Alden gazes out, the chopper circles low, over a cold and snowy expanse ... This last year has left Alden

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

somewhat gaunt, ravaged by pain, but the life force hasn't deserted him yet. Winds buffet the helicopter, bouncing him, making him wince. He pops a codeine pill, then turns to Clyde and signals: Set her down. We SUPER UP:

LABRADOR, NEWFOUNDLAND

CUT TO:

INT. ALDEN'S CABIN - AFTERNOON

Clearly abandoned for some months. A few stripped caribou bones on the floor, items of mouse-eaten clothing strewn, several windows shattered: a chill wind WHISTLES through.

Clyde watches, impassive, as Alden picks through the rubble, uncertain what to think. Now he finds something, under the bed: one of Laura's cowboy boots. Alden strokes the leather, remembering her ... Finally, Clyde must interrupt:

CLYDE

We're losing light, the temperature's dropping, we don't want ice on the rotors ... We'd better start back, sir.

Alden knows he's right. He drops the boot.

EXT. CABIN - DUSK

Alden takes one last mournful look around: nothing. Then regretfully turns away. The old tycoon and the young pilot carefully trudge back to the clearing where the chopper sits.

Clyde gently helps his boss over to the cockpit, helps him inside. As the blades start up and the helicopter rises, we PAN BACK to the cabin, and PUSH IN on the woods ...

At first all we can make out are the lean tree trunks, gnarled branches powdered with snow. But as we TIGHTEN ...

... we FIND two pairs of yellow eyes, staring out. Watching.

We've seen those eyes before. But now deep within them is the soul of wildness. A wildness that once belonged to all of us, that has been stolen from us. From most of us.

CUT TO BLACK